

Cases From Our Clinic: Facial Abscess

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Fletch, a lively, affectionate 4-year-old Golden Retriever, had been our patient since his owner, Luke, brought him in as a 9-week-old puppy.

We always enjoyed Fletch's happy disposition, and were surprised when he arrived at our clinic uncharacteristically listless and sullen.

Fletch had a marble-sized bump underneath his left eye. Luke was very concerned, and told us that the bump had increased in size over two weeks and occasionally oozed a pinkish fluid. Luke also said that Fletch was less tolerant of petting, eating less than normal, and generally uninterested in his chew toys.

Due to Fletch's symptoms, we immediately suspected an abscess of the left carnassial tooth, his upper fourth premolar. The roots of the upper fourth premolars are very long, and infection sometimes causes swelling under the eye. A dental X-ray confirmed our suspicions. Luke was very surprised that Fletch had a tooth abscess, since he regularly brushed his pet's teeth and was very conscious of overall dental health. Fletch did, however, have a bad habit of chewing on rocks. We suspected that Fletch's affinity for rocks caused the tooth to crack allowing bacteria to move into the pulp canal and cause an abscess around the tooth root.

Because of the infection and the way the tooth was fractured, the best option was to remove the tooth entirely. Luckily, we were able to perform surgery the same afternoon.

A pre-anesthesia screening confirmed that Fletch was healthy enough to handle general anesthesia. Once Fletch was anesthetized, we performed a complete dental prophylaxis (cleaning and polishing). We then pulled the bad tooth, cleaned out the socket, and sutured the socket shut to prevent contamination from food or other material. Fletch came through the surgery just fine and went home that evening with prescriptions for antibiotics, pain medication, and instructions to eat only soft foods for the next two weeks or so.

Luke called us the next day to report that Fletch already seemed to be feeling better. Ten days later, Luke brought Fletch back for a follow-up. Healing was progressing fine, the infection was gone, and Fletch was back to his old happy self.