

Dentistry, my own painful experience

by Dr Ted Reitsma

I have been telling clients for years that their pets bad teeth are painful, and as predatory animals, they hide this (due to fear of showing weakness in the wild). I tell them that a few weeks after extraction, owners tell me that their pet seems even more active and engaging with family than before, or that their pet seems 'better' but they cannot clarify what this means.

I have had cavities for years as well as fillings put in and the cavities never caused any pain. I was told that I had them on dental radiographs and the dentist went on to fix the problem. Now that I am older, and my teeth are older, some of the fillings have fallen out and some of the teeth cracked as well. Again, I have had no pain and they were fixed by the dentist.

One day, one of the filling failed and the dentist was worried that there was not enough room to put a filling, it was so close to the pulp. Well, she was right. She fixed me up, but I did notice cold sensitivity to the tooth when drinking cold and some hot fluids. I just ignored this and drank to one side. This went on for several months. The pain level if I drank cold fluid on that side would be a 3 out of 10.



Then it happened: I started to feel pain which was 8 out of 10. It had nothing to do with eating or drinking. Saying that, eating on that side or cold/hot fluids would bring on the extreme pain immediately as opposed to intermittently day or night.

I was given the choice of root canal or extraction. Root canals are very expensive and do not always work. Extraction should take care of it for life as the tooth is gone. I do it on my pet patients all the time for the same reasons. It was a back tooth that no one could see, so why not?

The dentist that did the extractions was not the normal dentist I see, and I had to wait for a month due to scheduling. During that month long wait, I noticed I had pain on other upper molar teeth as well as the lower molar teeth. I asked the dentist about this and she said that this is not uncommon as the nerve tricks you into thinking the pain is elsewhere as well. She was confident based on exam and radiographs that it was just the one tooth. I was highly skeptical, as I could not see how the pain could go up the nerve and down the nerve to the lower jaw from the upper maxilla teeth. I told her that I was on anti-inflammatories that they had given me before for pulpitis, and they did little. She said that it is because the tooth is infected and I should be on antibiotics. She was right. About 5 days into antibiotics the pain was almost gone. I knew however, the cause was not; infection would reoccur if I did not have dentistry, it was just a matter of time.

I had the tooth extracted. The dentist tried to make a joke pointing to the wrong tooth (not funny!). I asked the dentist if I could keep the tooth. He obviously has never had this request before but he was more than happy to give it to me. My staff loved my tooth, my wife and the tooth fairy not so much. I keep my tooth at the clinic with my dental teeth models for client education.

The moral of this story is that teeth problems can be VERY painful. I did not stop eating, I did not paw at my mouth. I did experience pain in other teeth which was 'referred pain' from the single infected tooth. I was less engaging in family conversations as all I could think about is the pain.



My mouth after extraction feels fine. The other teeth are not painful at all now. I just cannot eat pretzels on that side of my mouth without injury.