

My Westie puppy's teeth have been falling out. I found two on the floor this week. She is about 5 months old. Is this normal?

Yes, it is normal for puppies to lose their baby teeth, just like children lose theirs. Pups have 28 sharp little puppy (deciduous) teeth that begin to erupt at about a month old and are all present by two months. By 4 months, the roots of the deciduous teeth begin to resorb (dissolve). The tooth loosens and falls out as the permanent one moves in to take its place. The first to be lost are the incisors, the front 6 teeth on the top and bottom. Next, the long fang-like canine teeth should fall out as the permanent canines erupt. All of the 42 permanent teeth should be in place by the time a puppy is about 6 months old.

It is important for you to check her mouth regularly during these few months of teething for several reasons. One important reason is to get her accustomed to having her mouth and teeth touched, so you can more easily train her to accept tooth brushing. It is never too early to start that. A small amount of blood along the gum where a tooth fell out is normal, so don't be surprised if you see that. Another important reason for you to keep checking her teeth and for your veterinarian to check them at each puppy visit, is to watch for retained deciduous teeth. The deciduous tooth should be out by the time you see the larger permanent one beginning to poke through the gum. If the permanent tooth is coming in when the baby tooth is still in the same location, it may come in crooked and cause problems. There will be crowding of the teeth which allows food to become trapped between them more easily causing plaque accumulation and eventual periodontal disease. In addition, particularly in the case of the canine teeth, if the permanent one is forced to erupt at the wrong angle, it may poke into the tongue, roof of the mouth or upper gum and cause painful damage instead of lining up in a normal position with the canine tooth of the opposite jaw. It is best to have these retained deciduous teeth surgically extracted to prevent a problem that will be more difficult to fix once the permanent teeth have fully erupted.

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