

Tooth Alignment and Treatment Options

Tooth numbers in the adult dog¹

- Incisors, 6 each jaw
- Canines, 2 each jaw
- Premolars, 8 each jaw
- Molars, 4 upper jaw, 6 lower jaw

Normal occlusion or how teeth meet when the lower jaw (mandible) and upper jaw (maxilla) come together, has several components (for photos see reference²):

- The upper 6 incisors just overlap the lower 6 incisors in a scissor bite
- The lower 2 canines are located at an equal distance between the upper third incisors and the upper canine teeth
- The premolar crown tips of the lower jaw are between the spaces of the upper premolar teeth. There are 3 premolars on each side, upper and lower.

Flat faced breeds normally have a lower jaw protruding in front of the upper jaw which changes the normal occlusion alignments.

Malocclusion refers to abnormal tooth alignment. When an abnormal jaw length creates a malalignment of the teeth it is a skeletal malocclusion. When the upper and lower jaw lengths are normal but one or more teeth are out of alignment it is a dental malocclusion.

- Skeletal malocclusions
 - Overbite (overshot). The lower jaw is shorter relative to the upper jaw. There is space between the upper and lower incisors when the mouth is closed. The lower incisors may contact the roof of the mouth behind the upper incisors. The upper premolars are aligned too far toward the nose compared to the lower premolars
 - Underbite (undershot, reverse scissor bite). The lower jaw is too long relative to the upper jaw and lower teeth protrude in front of the corresponding front teeth. When the jaw length discrepancy is small, the upper and lower incisors can meet edge to edge; this is known as a level bite.
 - Various asymmetries in any of the jaws (2 upper and 2 lower)
- Dental malocclusions
 - Rostral crossbite. Canine and premolar teeth bilaterally are aligned normally but the lower incisors are positioned in front of the upper incisors when the mouth is closed
 - Caudal crossbite. One or more of the lower cheek teeth are more towards the cheek than the opposing upper cheek teeth when the mouth is closed.
 - Base narrow canines. A lower canine (one or both) is angled inward and often comes into traumatic contact with the roof of the mouth. Often it is due to persistent baby teeth.

When a dental malocclusion doesn't interfere with function, it is left alone. Treatment is indicated when there is interference with other teeth, dog's ability to eat, or gum tissue is rubbed against or penetrated. Read about the treatment options of tooth extraction, crown reduction and restoration, or tooth movement in reference 3.

References

1. <https://www.petmd.com/dog/care/how-many-teeth-do-dogs-have-and-can-they-lose-them>
2. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/malocclusions-in-dogs-when-teeth-dont-align>
3. <https://vcahospitals.com/know-your-pet/what-you-can-do-for-a-dog-with-misalignment-of-teeth-malocclusion>