

# NAME THAT BITE

What is meant by the words overbite, open bite, overbite, level bite, overshot, underbite, anterior crossbite, wry bite, retained deciduous teeth and base narrow canines? The following proper terms are used by breeders, show judges, veterinarians and others who want to express specific dental conditions in cats and dogs.

**Anatomy:** *Deciduous teeth* are primary/baby teeth that erupt during the first six months of life. Cats have 26 deciduous and 30 adult teeth. Dogs normally have 28 deciduous and most breeds have 42 adult teeth.

There are **4** types of teeth:

**Incisors** are the smaller teeth located between the canines on the lower and upper jaws. They are used for grasping food and to help keep the tongue within the mouth.

**Canines** (also called cuspids or fang teeth) are located on the sides of the incisors and used to grasp food.

**Premolars** (bicuspid) are for shearing or cutting food and are located behind the canines.

The **molars** are the *last teeth to emerge in the mouth*. They are used for grinding nourishment for entry into the esophagus.

**Missing or Extra Teeth:** *Cats and dogs are frequently born without the proper number of teeth.* Extra (supernumerary) teeth can cause **periodontal disease** from overcrowding. The American Kennel Club sets the standards concerning the minimum number of teeth for each breed of dog that can be shown. Dental radiographs can be safely taken as early as 10 weeks of age to evaluate if the correct number of adult teeth are present. This is recommended as part of the repurchased examination in certain breeds.

**Occlusion:** The way teeth align with each other is termed occlusion. In most breeds occlusion normally consists of the upper (maxillary) incisors just overlapping the lower (mandibular) incisors (scissor bite). The lower canine should be located equidistant between the last (lateral) incisor and the upper canine tooth. Premolar tips of the lower jaw should point between the spaces of the upper jaw teeth. *Flat-faced breeds (Boxers, Shih Tzus and Lhasa Apsos) normally do not have scissor bites.*

**Malocclusion** refers to abnormal tooth alignment.

**Overbite** (overshot, class two, overjet, mandibular brachygnathism) occurs when the lower jaw is shorter than the upper. There is a gap between the lower and upper incisors when the mouth is closed. The upper premolars are displaced at least 25 percent toward the front when compared with the lower premolars.

**Underbite** (undershot, reverse scissor bite, prognathism, class three) occurs when the lower teeth protrude in front of the upper jaw teeth.

**Even or level bite** occurs when the lower and upper incisor teeth meet each other edge to edge.

**Open bite** occurs when the lower and upper incisors do not overlap or even meet each other when the mouth is closed.

**Anterior crossbite** occurs when the canine and premolar teeth on both sides of the mouth occlude normally but one or more of the lower incisors are positioned in front of the upper incisors. *The anterior crossbite, the most common malocclusion, is not considered genetic or hereditary and is correctable.*

**Posterior crossbite** occurs when one or more of the premolar lower jaw teeth overlap the upper jaw teeth. This rare condition occurs in the longer nosed dog breeds.

**Wry bite** occurs when one side of the jaw grows longer than the other. It is considered *hereditary and difficult to correct.*

**Base narrow canines** occur when the lower canine teeth protrude inward and *can damage the upper palate.* Often, this condition is due to retained baby teeth and *usually can be corrected* through inclined planes used to push the teeth into normal occlusion.