

# Understanding Oronasal Fistulas in Dogs: Causes, Symptoms, and Treatment

**Oronasal fistulas in dogs** occur when an abnormal passage forms between the mouth and the nasal cavity. This condition can result from birth defects, dental disease, trauma, or tumors, allowing food, fluids, and bacteria to travel between the mouth and nose. In a healthy dog, the mouth and nasal cavity are separated by a bone called the palatine bone. When a fistula forms, this separation is compromised, leading to discomfort and potential health complications.

## Causes of Oronasal Fistulas in Dogs

- 1. Congenital Abnormalities:** Some dogs are born with developmental defects like cleft palates, leading to oronasal fistulas. These conditions require early intervention.
- 2. Dental Disease:** Periodontal disease or severe tooth infections, especially in the upper jaw, can erode bone and create a fistula between the mouth and nasal cavity.
- 3. Trauma:** Accidents or bites can cause damage to the palatine bone, leading to fistula formation.
- 4. Tumors:** Oral tumors or cancers can erode the bone and cause a connection between the oral and nasal cavities



An Oronasal Fistula in a dog. This is where the canine tooth (fang) should be

## Symptoms of Oronasal Fistulas in Dogs

Common signs of **ornasal fistulas in dogs** include:

- **Nasal discharge:** Clear, bloody, or pus-filled discharge from the nose due to food or bacteria passing into the nasal passages.
- **Bad breath:** Persistent halitosis from food particles and bacteria entering the nasal cavity.
- **Coughing or gagging:** Occurs when food or liquids pass into the nasal passages.
- **Difficulty eating:** Discomfort or trouble while eating or drinking.
- **Frequent sneezing:** Caused by foreign materials in the nasal cavity.

## Diagnosing Oronasal Fistulas

A thorough veterinary examination is crucial to diagnosing oronasal fistulas. Your vet may use:

- **Oral examination:** Often performed under anesthesia to identify dental disease or trauma.
- **X-rays or CT scans:** Imaging helps detect bony defects, tumors, or severe dental disease contributing to the condition.

Continue>

# Treatment Options for Oronasal Fistulas

The most effective treatment for **oronasal fistulas in dogs** is surgical repair. This involves:

- **Surgical repair:** The surgeon removes diseased tissue and restores the separation between the mouth and nasal cavity using local tissue to close the fistula.
- **Dental care:** If dental disease caused the fistula, addressing these issues through cleanings, extractions, or infection treatment is essential.
- **Medications:** Antibiotics or anti-inflammatory drugs can manage infections and promote healing.
- **Nutritional management:** Soft foods may be recommended during recovery to ease discomfort.
- **Frequent sneezing:** Caused by foreign materials in the nasal cavity.



Repaired ONF

## Surgical Repair for Oronasal Fistulas

While surgical repair is the most definitive treatment for oronasal fistulas, its success can depend on several factors, such as the fistula's size and location, and the surgeon's expertise. If your general vet is not comfortable with this procedure, it's important to consult a veterinary dental specialist for the best possible outcome.

### Surgical Repair Summary:

- **General Anesthesia:** The veterinarian places your dog under general anesthesia to ensure they remain still and pain-free throughout the procedure.
- **Local Anesthesia:** They administer a nerve block to manage pain for up to three days after surgery.
- **Debridement:** The surgeon thoroughly cleans the area, removing any damaged or loose tissue around the fistula.
- **Flap Technique:** They create a tissue flap from the oral mucosa or nearby tissues to cover the fistula, ensuring the gap between the mouth and nasal cavity is sealed for proper healing.
- **Suturing:** The surgeon carefully stitches the flap, preventing any further communication between the oral and nasal cavities.
- **Recovery:** After the procedure, your pet may require a soft food diet and medications, such as antibiotics and pain relievers, to aid in healing.

Monitoring your pet's recovery closely is essential, and following your veterinarian's instructions will help ensure successful healing. Regular follow-up visits will confirm the fistula has been effectively closed.

Continue>

## Post-Surgical Care

After surgery, follow your vet's post-op care instructions carefully. This may include:

- Administering prescribed medications.
- Monitoring for complications.
- Feeding soft foods during the healing process.

Regular follow-up visits are vital to ensure the fistula heals properly and your dog recovers fully.

## Conclusion

Oronasal fistulas can cause significant discomfort for dogs, but with timely diagnosis and proper treatment, your pet can recover and lead a happy, healthy life. If you suspect your dog may have an oronasal fistula, consult a veterinarian immediately. Proper care and attention can prevent further complications and improve your pet's quality of life.

If you have concerns about your pet's oral health, feel free to contact us. We're here to help keep your furry friend free from dental-related pain and discomfort!

For more detailed information on oronasal fistulas and other dental conditions, you can visit the American Veterinary Dental College.