

Rabbit Dental Care

Rabbits have very different teeth to us. We have a set of "baby" teeth which are replaced by adult teeth that have to last the rest of our lives. Rabbits only have a single set of teeth which are not replaced, but continue to grow (up to 12cm in a year)!

The placement of their teeth is also very different. They have two large incisors at both the top and bottom of the front of the mouth, sometimes with tiny "peg" teeth hiding just behind. The incisors are the large teeth that can be easily seen when they eat or open their mouths. They also have two rows of molars at the back of their mouths to grind food.

Molars are impossible to see properly without special equipment so can be difficult to monitor.



Identifying Dental Problems

There are several ways in which to identify a dental problem in your rabbit.

The first sign is often a reduction in the amount of food that they are eating or any slowing down of their eating. This should prompt owners to book an appointment with a vet as soon as possible.

If the incisors have overgrown, it can be possible to see them either curled round or out of alignment but if the molars are the most seriously affected, it can be impossible to tell from just looking at them.



Overgrowth of the molars at the back leads to the edges becoming sharp spurs which cut into the tongue and/or cheeks.

Other signs might be the dropping of food, dribbling or being wet down the front of their chest.



If the roots of the teeth overgrow, bumps and abscesses in the jaw can occur, but root overgrowth can also begin to push on the tear ducts and cause them to block so a discharge around the eyes and tear staining may also be present.

In severe cases, teeth can grow right through the tissues and protrude through lips and cheeks. This is obviously very painful and should never be left until this point.

What Affects Dental Health in Rabbits?

The breed of rabbit can be important. Many lop eared rabbits have been bred to have short, flat faces which can affect the placement and alignment of the teeth.

Diet is also a key factor. If the teeth are not worn down they will continue to grow and become too long. A high fibre diet containing at least 80% hay and/or grass is the best way to aid the normal wear of the teeth.

Muesli-based diets should not be the main stay of any rabbit's diet. This diet does not allow the teeth to wear as required and is also linked to nutritional imbalances.



Other Health Issues

If your rabbit is unable to eat due to a problem with its teeth, it is very important to seek veterinary advice immediately. Rabbits can go into "gut stasis", a condition where their gut begins to shut down because there is no food passing through it. Smaller species, such as rabbits, can also become hypoglycaemic (low blood sugar) very quickly and both of these effects can prove rapidly fatal for your rabbit.

Importance of Hay in a Rabbit's Diet



TREATS
You can occasionally treat your rabbit with a piece of fruit or root vegetable, which is good for bonding with your pet. However, they are high in sugar, so limit them to avoid obesity and dental problems.

GOOD QUALITY HAY/GRASS
This should make up the majority of their diet and always be available. Hay is the essential source of fibre for healthy digestion and teeth and performing natural behaviour.

RABBIT FOOD
There are different types of food you can buy for your rabbit. Always follow the feeding guidelines on pack, for the correct amount to feed.

GREENS/LEAFY VEGETABLES
Provide additional nutrients and moisture in a rabbit's diet as well as offering a variety of textures and tastes providing stimulation and enrichment.

DON'T FORGET FRESH WATER!

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pet food manufacturers' association
www.pfma.org.uk

For more information please visit: www.pfma.org.uk/rabbits