

DENTAL DISEASE

WHAT'S HIDING IN YOUR RABBIT AND GUINEA PIGS MOUTH?

Correct dental alignment and wear is so important in both rabbits and guinea pigs. The reason for this is that their teeth are constantly growing throughout their lives. Rabbits have 28 teeth in total (4 incisors, 2 peg teeth and 22 back premolars and molars (often called the 'cheek teeth') and guinea pigs have 20 teeth in total (4 incisors and 16 back premolars and molars) all which grow continually. Incisor teeth can grow at around 3mm per week and the cheek teeth about 3mm a month.

The pattern in which they chew their food is actually what helps to wear their teeth. Both rabbits and guinea pigs chew in a lateral side-to-side motion which causes tooth on tooth grinding and helps to wear down their teeth. Diet plays a huge role in this chewing pattern as the types of food and how much chewing is needed for that food item is what helps the teeth wear on each other. Feeding your pet fresh hay and grasses, as well as being beneficial for gut health, requires the pet to put a lot more effort and force into chewing their food and grinding more with their teeth. Feeding a lot of softer foods such as pellets, fruits or vegetables don't require as much chewing meaning that the teeth are not worn down as they should be. Trauma to the mouth or genetics can also contribute to dental disease however an inappropriate diet would be the most common cause.

Correcting any problems with your animal's diet is the easiest thing to start with when there are concerns about dental disease. Their diet should consist of 80% fresh hay and grass, 10% leafy green vegetables, 5% pellets or chaff and 5% healthy treats.

In some cases dietary change alone isn't enough to correct the teeth and a dental procedure is needed. This involves a day procedure at the vets where your pet will go under a general anesthetic and their teeth will be ground down to a more normal alignment by the vet with a specialised dental bur. Sometimes the vet may need to extract any teeth that are not in the correct alignment and will cause problems for your animal in the future. Unfortunately once the position and alignment of the teeth are affected; in most cases repeat dental work will be required for the duration of the pet's life. Intervals for dental procedures can vary anywhere from monthly to once or twice a year.

It is advised that all our rabbit and guinea pig patients have dental checks with us every 3 – 6 months as preventing or resolving any issues early on before dental procedures are required is always the preferred method. Some signs of dental disease to look out for include:

- Your pet is off its normal food or not eating
- Selective eating – only eating softer foods
- Excessive salivation
- Weepy or watery eyes
- Formation of facial abscesses
- Loose faeces

