



# INCISOR MALOCCLUSION

Rabbits have six teeth at the front of their mouth as well as twenty two 'cheek' teeth at the back of the mouth. Their front teeth are further broken down into the four main ones (two upper and two lower) that are called incisors and the two small thin teeth behind the upper incisors that are referred to as peg teeth. All rabbit teeth grow continuously through-out their life and the incisors generally continue to grow at around 3-4 mm a week. We commonly see issues with incisor malocclusion (incisors not lining up correctly), particularly in rabbits that have a short face such as mini-lops or Netherland dwarfs.

*There are three main reasons that we see incisor malocclusion:*

1. *Trauma.* Falls or wire chewing can damage to incisors and change the direction in which they grow.

2. *Primary or Congenital Malocclusion.* This is the most common cause. Although mainly occurring in young rabbits it may take years for a problem to slowly show itself. These rabbits are born with teeth not growing evenly. Usually the back "cheek" teeth are normal. A poor diet can slowly exacerbate a low-grade issue.

3. *Secondary Malocclusions.* In older rabbit's cheek teeth problems can cause poor wear on the incisors which can then change the direction of their growth and lead to malocclusion.



## **Treatment Options**

There are two main treatment options for incisor malocclusion and the recommended course of action depends on the individual case so it is best to consult with your rabbit vet about which option would be best.

*Treatment option 1.* Regular trimming at the vets with a specialized dental burr is often one treatment option. This generally is needed every 2-8 weeks for the rest of your rabbit's life. The cost of this procedure is cheaper than removal initially but can add up over time. In many cases the procedure can be performed with your rabbit being awake (ie no general anaesthesia is needed). You must never 'clip' or 'cut' rabbits teeth with nail clippers or scissors as this can lead to tooth fractures and increase the risk of an abscess forming.





*Treatment option 2.* The more permanent option involves the removal of all the six front teeth. It is a big surgery and we do not usually combine this with other surgeries due to the time spent under anaesthetic. Prior to the surgery your rabbit is given a sedation and a number of pain relief injections.

A catheter is then placed in a vein and they are connected to an intravenous drip. Once the teeth have been removed your rabbit will need to have their vegetables grated or finely chopped so that they can eat them okay as they will no longer be able to bite chunks of food off whole vegetables.



It is important that prior to the surgery the teeth are not left too long. This may result in fractures below the gum line in the bone.

These fractures can sometimes prevent us from removing all the tooth and they can grow back meaning another surgery may be needed.

After the surgery your rabbit needs to have pain relief medication for the next 3-7 days. They also need to be kept inside for at least 7-10 days and not placed behind wire as some rabbits may rub their sockets on the wire causing infection and delaying healing.

If you are at all concerned about your rabbit's teeth please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

