



## **FACIAL LUMPS IN GUINEA PIGS**

The most common cause of a facial lump on a guinea pig is a tooth root abscess however there are a range of other causes.

Guinea pigs have 20 teeth in total. There are 2 front teeth (incisors), two on the top and two on the bottom. Guinea pigs also have 'cheek teeth' that are hidden at the back of the mouth. There are 4 on either side of the upper jaw and 4 on either side of the lower jaw. Guinea pig's teeth constantly grow and they need to be worn down with high amounts of dietary fibre (hay or grass) as their teeth can grow at up to 3mm a week

While some dental related diseases can be picked up by examining their back teeth during a consultation, often radiographs (x-rays) or a CT scan are needed to allow us to properly assess their tooth roots.

### ***Tooth root abscess management:***

Antibiotics can control some small tooth root abscesses in some cases, however we have to be careful with using long-term antibiotics in guinea pigs as in some cases they can affect their gastrointestinal system and cause diarrhoea. The only way to 'cure' a tooth root abscess is to remove the infected tooth and surrounding bone. Radiographs (x-rays) or a CT scan are required first to find out which tooth is causing the problem, and if there are any hidden problems. The success of surgery depends on the number of teeth involved and the position of the infected tooth. It should also be noted that some 'suspect' teeth may after surgery themselves develop into abscesses.

It is important to note that depending on the severity of the dental related problems, dental surgical intervention is likely to be ongoing. The frequency of the intervention needed generally ranges from every 4 weeks to every 12 months or not at all. This can often be predicted with radiographs or a CT scan but sometimes only time will tell. Every guinea pig also responds differently.

### ***Other causes of facial lumps:***

Guinea pigs are prone to developing scratches and abrasions in the mouth that can introduce infection under the skin. These can then result in abscesses and in severe cases the infection can move into the lymph nodes (often in their neck). In some cases long term antibiotics (3-6 weeks) can resolve these abscesses. Ideally surgery is undertaken to remove the abscess as a whole, with a sample from the abscess sent to an external laboratory for culture to find out what bacteria are present. If this is not possible and antibiotic therapy is not resolving the abscess we can consider lancing the abscess, which is successful in some cases. This results in an open wound that you will often need to clean and flush until it heals.

Other unusual and rare causes of lumps on the face are cancers. Surgical removal with further analysis or a biopsy can tell us what the lump is and provide us with treatment options.

If you are at all concerned about your guinea pig or would like any further information please don't hesitate to get in contact with us.

