

# DENTAL DISEASE IN RABBITS

Rabbits and Guinea pigs have very special teeth that grow constantly throughout their life. Their incisors (front teeth) grow 2-3 mm every week and the molars (back teeth) grow 2-3 mm per month. In the wild, they eat very fibrous food such as grass and roots and as their teeth grind side to side rather than bite straight through like ours do, they constantly wear down. Therefore, in captivity, we need to provide diets and supplements that can cause this natural wear of the teeth or they grow too long.

Fibrous grasses and hay are not only really important for gastrointestinal health in these creatures but also in dental health as chewing through these helps wear the teeth down naturally. (Other objects for chewing include untreated logs or larger pieces of wood. Unfortunately some rabbits will chew their hutch as a way to wear their teeth). When this does not occur and the teeth become too long, a range of other health issues can occur including:

- wounds to the mouth and lips
- inappetance (not eating) then weight loss (which can be fatal)
- difficulty chewing or excessive saliva
- abscesses
- eye problems
- diarrhoea (which can be fatal)
- PAIN!!!

In some cases ensuring correct diet isn't enough to keep the teeth at their correct level. There may be a deformity the rabbit or guinea pig has had since birth causing the teeth not to rub against each other properly, or they may have had an injury causing them to be out of alignment. In these cases, the teeth need to be trimmed. This involves cutting pieces of the teeth off with a specially designed piece of equipment called a dental burr. If it is only the incisors (front teeth) that are problematic then these can be trimmed while the rabbit is awake. The rabbit is wrapped securely in a warmed towel and the teeth are trimmed with the burr. This procedure is pain free as there are no nerves in this part of the tooth (although it does vibrate a bit and some rabbits take a little while to settle with this feeling). Generally this needs to be repeated every 4-6 weeks.

If the molars are a problem, these also need to be filed or trimmed back. For this a full anaesthetic and very special equipment is required. We do not have these facilities so these rabbits are referred to specialist rabbit vets in Melbourne. There is actually a veterinary clinic in Melbourne dedicated to rabbits and guinea pigs. No cats or dogs there! For further assistance please call us on **53811996**.