

The Good Companions VETERINARY CLINIC

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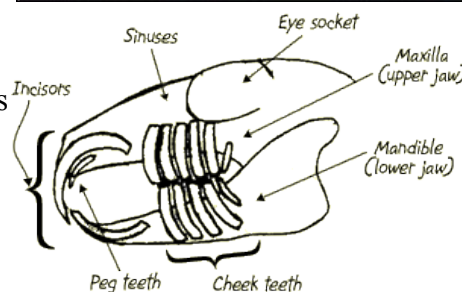
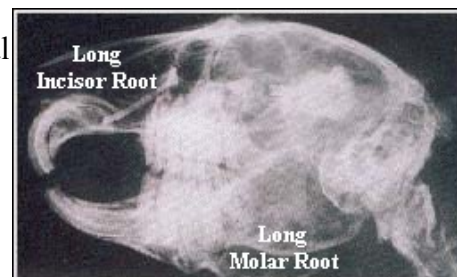


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DENTAL DISEASE IN RABBITS

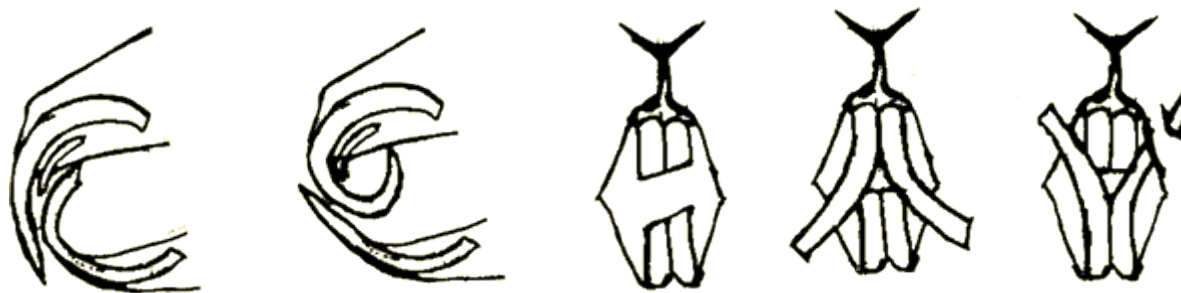
Healthy and functional dentition is essential for rabbits. Dental problems are common and lead to eating problems and ultimately anorexia which is severely detrimental to your rabbit's health.

Rabbits' teeth grow continually throughout life, they therefore rely on grinding action when eating to keep their teeth at a normal length. Dental problems may be complicated by a nutritional deficiency in calcium and vitamin D. More commonly, insufficient physical properties of rabbit food leads to dental problems. Rabbits need tough, abrasive foodstuffs, such as grass and hay to be able to grind their teeth.



Incisor Malocclusion

This is also known as reverse bite, the incisors grow rapidly and are not aligned properly. Incisor malocclusion may occur in young rabbits due to genetics, or in later life secondary to acquired cheek teeth problems.



The incisors become overgrown leading to:

- Eating difficulties
- Grooming difficulties
- Inability to perform coprophagia (the natural behaviour of eating and re-digestion of own faeces).
- Trauma to soft tissue in the mouth.
- Pain

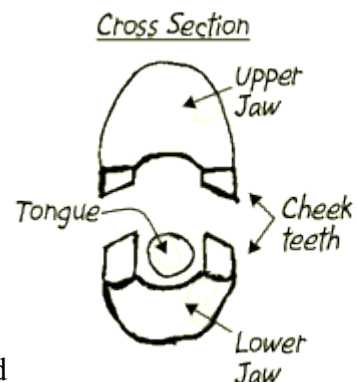
In addition the incisors may intrude into the maxilla (the top jaw) which causes constriction of the nasolacrimal duct. This will cause weepy eyes.

Cheek Teeth Problems

Inadequate grinding and malocclusion results in overgrowth of the cheek teeth. When the teeth are maloccluded the teeth are worn unevenly, only part of the teeth is worn down. Spurs are then formed when part of the tooth has not been ground down, these form into sharp points.

Spurs cut into the soft tissue of the mouth and tongue causing trauma lesions, pain and bleeding.

This condition is painful and causes eating difficulties, if left untreated this condition leads to anorexia.



Facial Abscesses

These are formed around tooth roots when the teeth become infected, they most commonly occur in rabbits with dental disease and are more likely if dental problems are left untreated. The jaw bones can become infected. The prognosis for facial abscesses is poor, at best the abscess is controlled with regular draining and antibiotics, at worse the infection spreads into the blood stream and causes severe illness.

Treatment

Incisors can be trimmed regularly with a dental drill or burr. This will return them to normal length but if malaligned they will regrow. In severe cases we may recommend removal of the incisor teeth.

Cheek teeth can be clipped and rasped to remove the spurs and reshape the teeth. This will make your rabbit more comfortable and encourage it to eat evenly and grind its teeth. A good diet is essential to assist in keeping the cheek teeth ground down. Many rabbits require repeat dentals to prevent sores, anorexia and facial abscesses as their teeth will continue to grow throughout life.

Prevention: Things to Remember

GRASS, GRASS, GRASS!

Hay and grasses should be the main part of a rabbit's diet to encourage grinding of the teeth and to provide the vitamins and minerals rabbits require.

Keep commercial foods to a minimum as they are soft and non-abrasive. This means that they do not allow for sufficient grinding of the teeth. Although they are delicious, your rabbit will often select to eat commercial diets instead of the grass or hay they need.

Observe for inappetance, weight loss, weepy eyes, poor coat condition, overgrowth of the incisors or faeces stuck around your rabbit's bottom. These can all be signs of dental disease, you should arrange an appointment for a vet to check your rabbit's teeth immediately.

Regular examination of your rabbit's mouth is essential to catch problems before they cause pain and anorexia, we recommend that we examine rabbit's mouths every 6 months.