Dental Care: Healthy Rabbit Teeth Checkup

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Rabbits - like cats, dogs, and humans - have two sets of teeth. One set (called "deciduous") is shed and replaced by a permanent set. However, in rabbits, the deciduous teeth are rarely seen, as they are generally shed before birth or shortly thereafter. Unlike dogs and cats however, rabbit teeth grow continually throughout life.

A diet consisting of tough, fibrous roughage is extremely important to a rabbit's dental health. If a rabbit is fed a diet that does not require sufficient chewing, cheek tooth wear is uneven. This causes spikes of enamel to grow on the outer and inner sides of the teeth. These spikes can cause severe oral pain resulting in excessive salivation (often called "slobbers"), reluctance to chew, inability to close the mouth, and reduced food intake. The situation deteriorates as the teeth continue to grow, and, if it is not treated, will result in severe malnutrition.

In some species, cheek tooth overgrowth can lead to root elongation. When this occurs the root continues to grow through the oral tissues causing swellings. If this occurs in the upper jaw, the root can grow to the point of affecting the eyes, resulting in watering, bulging, or inflammation.

Because treatment options for dental disorders are limited, prevention is best. The teeth should be examined routinely for abnormalities, and a balanced diet enriched with coarse vegetation should be fed to maintain adequate wear. Contact your veterinarian if you see abnormal growth or if your pet drools, has difficulty chewing, is eating less, or shows pain when touched around the mouth or head.

If diagnosed early, the enamel points and/or overgrown incisors can be trimmed by your veterinarian. In more severe cases, permanent damage may have already occurred.

It is important to know the anatomy and physiology of your rabbit's teeth so you can provide appropriate care and nutrition to stave off potential dental problems.

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