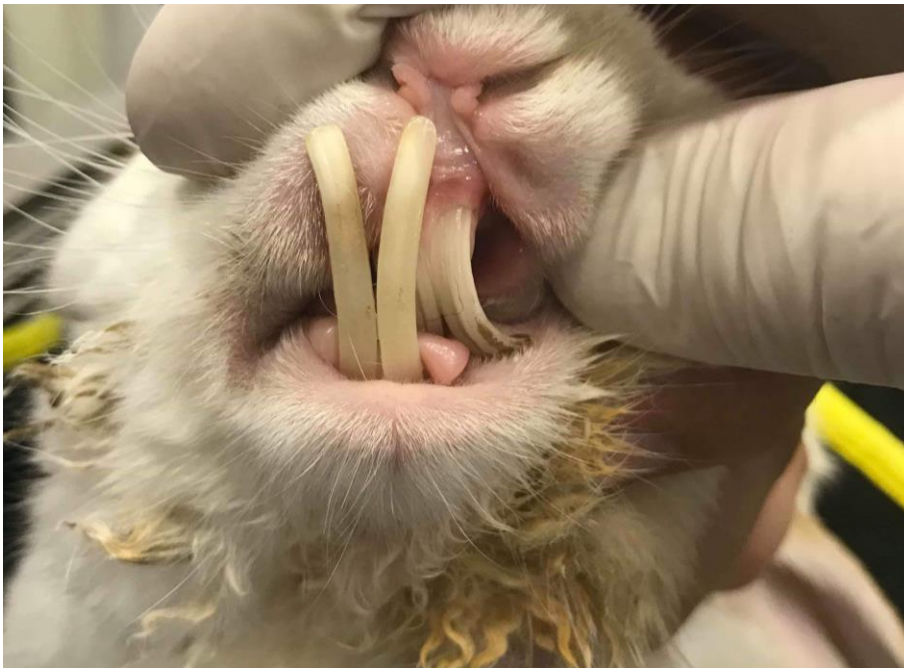


Dental problems in rabbits

Overview

Your rabbits' front teeth are for picking up and cutting blades of grass and hay. Their back teeth are for grinding food into a pulp.

Your rabbits' teeth are constantly growing - from the day they are born to the day they die. They need to chew lots of fibre (grass and hay) to wear them down and make sure they don't grow too long.



This rabbit is unable to eat, drink or groom due to her severely overgrown front teeth.

The biggest cause of dental problems in rabbits is poor diet. They should be fed:

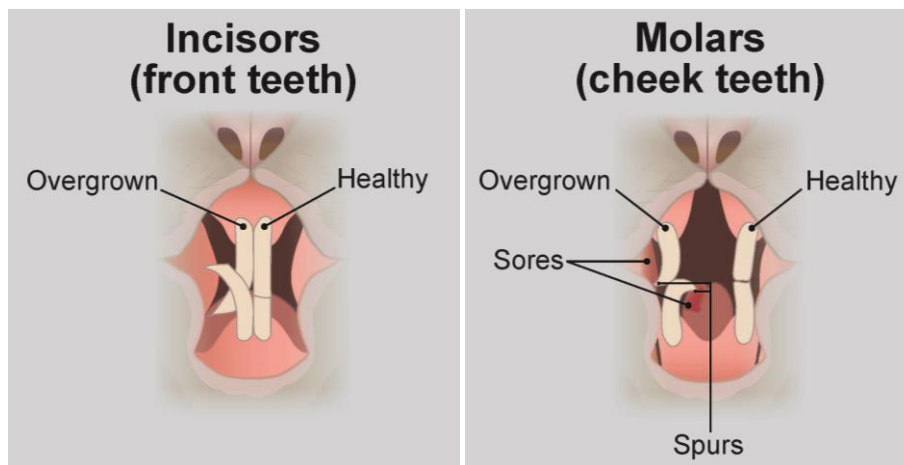
- Mostly hay and grass. As a rule, fresh hay or growing grass (not grass clippings) should always be available to your rabbits. If a bunny doesn't eat fibre their teeth are

likely to overgrow which can cause major problems and even death.

- An adult-sized handful of suitable fresh greens morning and evening.
- A tablespoon of rabbit nuggets once daily (or twice daily if the rabbits weigh over 3.5kg).

Contact your vet for an appointment as soon as possible if your rabbit is showing any signs of dental disease.

Dental problems explained



Overgrown front teeth

If a rabbit's front teeth grow too long or in the wrong direction, they will struggle to close their mouth, eat drink or groom. If they have overgrown front teeth, they're back teeth are also likely to be overgrown.

Overgrown back teeth

Overgrown back teeth develop very sharp edges (spurs) that dig into the cheeks and tongue (see image above). This causes extreme pain every time your rabbit tries to eat or drink.

Abscesses

Rabbits can suffer from tooth root abscesses which are very painful and need immediate veterinary treatment.

Symptoms



Weepy eyes often indicates dental disease in rabbits.

- Difficulty eating
- Eating less
- Weight loss
- Weepy eyes (see image below)
- Bumpy jawline
- Dribble on chin
- Less active/quiet
- Missing teeth
- Long/deformed teeth
- A damp, matted backend (grooming becomes too painful)

Your rabbits will hide pain and any health problems for as long as they can, they will only stop eating and drinking once their dental disease has become very serious. This is because showing any sign of weakness in the wild would make them a target for predators.

If a rabbit doesn't eat enough, or stops eating completely, their guts will stop moving (gut stasis). Gut stasis is a very serious condition and without rapid veterinary treatment, can lead to death.

When to contact your vet

Your rabbits will hide pain and any health issues so you need to keep a close eye out for problems. Look at their general health as well as their mouth. Do they have a wet chin or back end? Are they eating less than usual? Do they feel lighter to pick up? Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any of the symptoms listed above.

It's also important to have your rabbits' teeth checked regularly by a vet or vet nurse (at least once a year, ideally more regularly). Your vet will be able to look right to the back of their mouth using a special instrument.

You know your rabbits best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Causes

Food

- Feeding a poorly balanced diet is likely to cause dental disease.
- Check out PDSA's feeding guide for rabbits.

Breed

- Rabbits with short, round faces are more likely to have dental problems because their teeth are squashed into a small space. Breeds at risk include the Netherland Dwarf and Lionhead.

Age

- Dental problems are more common in older rabbits. Senior rabbits should be checked regularly for problems.
- When do my rabbits become senior?
 - Small breeds – over 8 years

- Medium breeds – over 6 years
- Large breeds – over 4 years
- Small breed rabbits live longer than large breed rabbits, so they are considered ‘senior’ at different ages.

Treatment

WARNING

Never trim your rabbits’ teeth at home. You may crack the root, which will cause severe pain and long-term problems.

If your rabbit has dental problems, your vet may suggest the following treatments:

Dental surgery

- Overgrown front teeth can be shortened using a dental burr. It’s safest to do this under an anaesthetic.
- Spurs on the back teeth need to be smoothed; they can be burred down with special dental equipment under anaesthetic.

Pain relief

- Your vet may prescribe anti-inflammatory pain relief to make your rabbit more comfortable.

Antibiotics

- Antibiotics aren’t needed for all dental problems but are sometimes used to treat tooth root infections.
- Antibiotics can upset a rabbit’s gut and for this reason your vet may decide against prescribing them.

Preventing dental problems

Food

- Keep a close eye on how much your rabbits are eating each day. This will help you notice quickly if something changes.
- Give each of your rabbits at least their own body size in good quality hay and grass each day. As a rule, either fresh hay or growing grass (not grass clippings) should always be available. If a rabbit doesn't eat enough grass or hay their teeth are likely to overgrow.
- They can also have an adult-sized handful of suitable fresh greens morning and evening and a tablespoon of rabbit nuggets once daily (or twice daily if the rabbits weigh over 3.5kg).
- Check out our feeding guide for more information.



Give each of your rabbits a pile of hay and grass as big as them, every day.

Dental checks

- Check your rabbits' teeth regularly and have dental checks with your vet.

Why is a muesli diet so bad for my rabbit?

Feeding a muesli-style diet often means your rabbits will pick out the tasty bits but leave the healthier bits. This can lead to obesity and dental problems.

It might look less interesting, but grass, hay, fresh greens and a small amount of pellet food is a much healthier and natural diet for your rabbits.

Ongoing care

A rabbit that has previously had dental problems will need regular check up's and dental care for life. It's especially important for a rabbit with dental problems to eat plenty of grass and hay every day.

Cost

Dental disease in rabbits can be very expensive, especially because it's often an ongoing problem. Always speak to your vet if you can't afford the treatment they have recommended, there may be other options.

If you are struggling with veterinary fees, PDSA offers free or reduced cost treatment to eligible clients. We strongly recommend insuring your rabbit as soon as you get them so that you are covered for any problems. Always check if your insurance policy covers dental disease.

Published: September 2018