



Guinea Pig Dental Disease

Dental disease is one of the most common problems we see with our guinea pig patients. It is a terrible disease as it hurts when they eat!

These animals are adapted to feed on tough and fibrous grasses, and these foods need a lot of chewing. Guinea pig's teeth grow throughout their life and if they are not worn down properly, or if the tooth position changes in the jaw (often because there is not enough vitamin C in the diet) or because of genetic problems, then the teeth can overgrow or develop sharp points or spikes which can cut into the cheek or tongue.

A healthy hay based diet is very important for dental health and we strongly advise the diet be based around grass hays, such as timothy hay, mountain or orchard grass. Appropriate levels of vitamin C are also important for tooth and gum health.

Dental disease can be extremely painful, as can easily be imagined, and some animals will stop eating and starve to death without proper attention.

Symptoms of dental disease can include:

- 1) Eating less, (particularly the foods that need more chewing like hay)
- 2) Salivation and dropping foods.
- 3) Temper changes, becoming angry, biting the cage bars, seeking attention..
- 4) Tooth grinding or clicking
- 5) Weight loss or smaller faeces

During the consultation the vet will carefully examine the jaw bone and face, check the incisors, or front teeth, and examine the teeth within the mouth using a speculum. It is difficult to get a good view as the poor animal will usually chew and push the speculum away with the tongue, and there may be too much saliva and pieces of food floating around.

If we suspect there is dental disease we will advise a full and proper examination under a full anaesthetic. We use a combination of injectable drugs, such as pain killers and sedatives, along with oxygen and the anaesthetic gas isoflurane

We will often suggest a blood test to check on the liver and kidney function before the procedure. Radiographs (X rays) are useful to look at the length of the tooth roots and to see if there is any infection in or around the teeth.

We use a specialized dental 'rack' which holds the mouth open and examine with the endoscope (a kind of miniature medical camera) and we will usually collect photos for our medical record and to show you later.

The vet will then use a combination of equipment to take away sharp spikes and reduce the length of any overlong crowns. If there are loose or rotten teeth we will need to remove these.

After care may include pain killers, antibiotics, support feeding until the appetite returns, and may include a change in diet long term to promote good dental health.