

## **RABBITS – TEETH AND DIET**

Rabbit teeth are different from dog, cat and indeed human teeth as they grow continually throughout the rabbit's life.

In a normal mouth, these teeth are aligned so that as the rabbit chews, the teeth wear down evenly against one another.

Domesticated rabbits tend to have rather differently shaped jaws to wild rabbits, their diet is different, and they live longer. All these factors combine to predispose pet rabbits to “malocclusion” of the teeth, or teeth that do not wear down evenly against each other.

### **Is malocclusion of the teeth a problem?**

If teeth wear is uneven, sharp edges or points can develop leading to ulceration of the cheeks and over growth of the incisors. Signs that your rabbit is developing problems are drooling or saliva staining around the mouth, wanting to eat but showing pain when feeding, runny eyes or unusual changes of appetite.

### **Treatment options**

Treatment can be by clipping the teeth in the conscious rabbit- a stressful procedure which can cause fracturing of the teeth or by administering an anaesthetic and grinding the teeth back into a normal shape.

### **Prevention is better than the cure.**

Make sure your rabbit gets lots of hay, preferably fresh grass hay. Try to avoid alfalfa and clover hay as they are too rich in protein.

Hay provides fibre which is essential to normal gut function and provides wear for the teeth. Be careful of feeding too many commercial pellets - obesity can result! A good pellet should be at least 22% fibre and, at most, 14% protein, 1% fat and around 1% calcium. We find fresh vegetables are good for rabbits, and help in maintaining a healthy gut, but be sure your rabbit is getting enough hay at the same time!

Avoid dried nuts, seeds etc as these are very high in carbohydrates, and may encourage your rabbit to eat these so called “treat” foods in preference to a normal healthy diet. The odd piece of fresh fruit is fine, but again, be aware that your rabbit may come to expect fruit and make himself unwell in the process.