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Rabbit diets and dental check ups

Rabbit teeth are similar to horse teeth. They have evolved over time to break down tough, fibrous vegetation, such as grasses, weeds, twigs and leaves, the natural forage of wild rabbits. To compensate for this constant wear, rabbit teeth are open-rooted, which means they grow continuously throughout their lives. If they are not being worn down then they will start to grow up instead, potentially occluding tear ducts.

The 2 most important factors in keeping your rabbits teeth in good shape are

- 6 monthly dental checks with a vet
- High fibre diets

Hay is the most important part of your rabbit's diet, not only because of the necessary fiber content that keeps the gut functioning properly, but also because it requires a great deal of chewing. Limiting the pellets or muesli that you feed your rabbit is important, because it will help encourage your rabbit to eat more hay, rather than filling up on the less fibrous food. An ideal rabbit diet will consist of 75% hay, 15% pellets and 10% fresh vegetables or leaves from the garden. Rabbits are particularly fond of dandelion leaves.

It is also helpful to offer your rabbit tough, fibrous tree branches, leaves and twigs. It is important to make sure you gather these from rabbit-safe trees and bushes that have NOT been chemically treated with fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. *While wooden chew blocks are fun to play with and great for the **front** teeth (if your rabbit chews on them), they are not particularly useful for the back teeth.*

Some rabbit-safe chewables you may find in your garden:

- Orange or lemon trees – branches may be fed fresh or dried
- Apple trees – branches may be feed fresh or dried
- Willow - branches may be fed fresh or dried
- Maple, Ash and Pine trees – branches should be dried
- Rose Canes – remove thorns, branches and leaves may be fed fresh or dried

Branches can also be purchased at most pet shops, these are normally dried and provide entertainment as well as being beneficial to their teeth.

My rabbit is eating and not showing any signs of pain, doesn't that mean his teeth are healthy?

NO! Rabbits are prey animals. This means that in the wild everything eats them, and if they show signs that they are ill, they are more likely to be targeted for dinner. Our domestic rabbits hide their pain in much the same way: This is why rabbits are so (frighteningly) good at hiding illnesses and why owners must be so diligent in observing them for small changes (such as drooling or running eyes), as well as making sure that they get frequent vet check-ups and dental work done when needed.