Why is dental care so important for my rabbit?

A healthy mouth and teeth are essential to your rabbit’s well-being. Oral or dental disease can affect your rabbit’s ability to eat properly, to groom and to perform normal social behaviors. It can also lead to tooth overgrowth and serious or even life threatening infections.

What can cause my rabbit to develop dental problems?

There are a number of factors that can negatively affect dental health. Rabbit teeth grow continuously and at a rapid rate (2-3mm per week), which is the reason why dental problems can occur so quickly.

- Genetics can cause some rabbits to be predisposed to health issues. Lop-eared rabbits for example have been bred with shorter jaws so the teeth don’t wear against each other and need extra care to avoid over growth.
- Trauma that causes damage to the teeth or jaw can keep the teeth from wearing properly against one another.
- Disease can affect growth and cause infection.
- Diet is extremely important in ensuring the teeth wear properly. A rabbit must receive adequate nutrition to maintain overall health. Contrary to popular belief, they don’t thrive on lettuce and carrots!

What can I do to help my rabbit remain healthy?

One of the most important things you can do is examine your rabbit’s face and teeth weekly.

- Gently touch around your rabbit’s jaw and watch to see if any area seems sensitive or painful. Note! Due to a scent gland under your rabbit’s chin, that area may feel bumpy.
- The four large teeth you see in front (2 top and 2 bottom) are incisor teeth. Check to see that they are not loose & that the gum tissue is healthy pink (not red or purple). Check to make sure the teeth meet and wear correctly (see illustration). Malocclusion (teeth that don’t meet and wear properly) allows teeth to overgrow and requires frequent trimming. Chew toys alone will not solve the problem. Consult your Banfield doctor if your rabbit has malocclusion.
- Behind the upper incisors are two small peg-like teeth called auxiliary incisors or “peg teeth.” They are harder to see than the incisors and rarely cause problems.

For additional information, please contact your Banfield medical team.
Dental Care for Your Rabbit continued...

• The rabbit's grinding teeth or cheek teeth are too far back in the mouth to be easily checked without the use of special medical equipment, but you can watch for secondary signs of cheek-tooth pain which include:
  ○ Reduced or altered appetite
  ○ Weight loss
  ○ Drooling
  ○ Matted or dirty coat
  ○ Behavioral change
  ○ Tooth grinding
  ○ Sensitivity to touch around the jaw
  ○ Swelling, wounds, or abrasions on or around face or mouth
  ○ Nasal discharge
  ○ Bad breath
  ○ Broken or discolored teeth
  ○ Change in feces (color, texture, frequency)
  ○ Bulging eyes

Secondly, provide your rabbit with a complete and balanced diet.

• Avoid foods and treats high in sugar
• Provide appropriate amounts of Vitamins A and D, Calcium, Magnesium and Phosphorus (rabbit feed with the proper amounts is available at PetSmart®)
• Feed a diet high in fiber (Timothy hay–daily), alfalfa—as a treat, and dried grass
• Offer appropriate, nontoxic materials for your rabbit to safely chew (untreated wood, cardboard, unaquered wicker baskets, dried pinecones)

Keep a close eye on your rabbit's weight so that slight changes are noticed in advance. Also, keep your rabbit away from electric wires, small objects (paperclips, rubber bands, pins, etc.) that could be a danger to your rabbit if ingested. In addition to dental exams and proper diet, schedule twice yearly exams with your Banfield doctor. As always, if you have any questions or concerns about your rabbit, contact your Banfield doctor.