

Chinchilla Chews On Itself and Loses Weight

Is it normal for a chinchilla to chew on itself and have weight loss?

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Q: My pet chinchilla recently has been chewing on herself and seems to have lost a little bit of weight. Is this normal or does she need a veterinarian?

A: Any time a chinchilla loses weight, that is cause for concern. If you have an overweight chinchilla and you are making a specific effort to get her to lose weight, that is fine. Of course, that needs to be done gradually. But if your chinchilla is losing weight, on its own, seek the advice of a veterinarian as soon as possible. There are two main reasons why.

First, the veterinarian needs to find out why the chinchilla is losing weight. It could have a dental disease, a metabolic disease, or there could be a behavioral reason for this. The list is endless. A thorough history and examination can help find out the most likely cause of this problem.

The second reason is just as important. When a chinchilla loses weight, fat can be mobilized from body stores; even in chinchillas that do not seem overweight. Some of the fat may be properly converted into needed energy if the chinchilla is not eating enough calories, but if too much fat is mobilized, the fat can be stored in the liver, causing damage to liver cells. With enough damage to the liver cells, a condition called hepatic lipidosis can occur. This is such a serious condition in chinchillas (and other small mammals) that this condition alone can be fatal.

When a chinchilla is losing weight, visit your veterinarian immediately to find out the primary cause and to prevent any potential liver damage due to the mobilization of fat stores.

It is normal for chinchillas to groom, but not to chew on themselves. Again, this is something for your veterinarian to examine.