

Chinchilla Has Overgrown Teeth

Overgrown teeth are a common chinchilla dental issue.

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Q: I think my chinchilla's teeth might be too long. She hasn't eaten in awhile, and really never poops, and has lost weight and she is hunch backed. I took her to the vet but nothing really happened. Is she propping her head up because of her teeth or mouth opening? I noticed dry saliva and am not sure what to do. Can I feed her anything with a syringe or small bottle?

A: I am sorry that your chinchilla did not get better once you visited your veterinarian. At this point, you should do one of two things. Either return to the veterinarian and discuss that nothing has gotten better and maybe it is even worse with your chinchilla and ask exactly what was done for your pet and what the diagnosis is or find another doctor for a second opinion.

With non-traditional pets, such as chinchillas, it is very important that you find a doctor that has a special interest in these animals and a doctor that will communicate effectively with you. As veterinarians, there is little to no training of these types of non-traditional pets in veterinary school. All of us that work on non-traditional pets have spent our free time researching, speaking with colleagues and going to conferences to learn about these pets. It takes a lot of effort and time to do this, and not all veterinarians have that inclination. Therefore, you need to search out a veterinarian that has done this.

Chinchillas are not small cats! Secondly, since there is little good information about these non-traditional pets in the literature or on the internet, you need excellent communication with your doctor to make sure you understand what they think is wrong with your pet and what they are recommending. You are spending good money to have someone take care of your small pet, you deserve information about the cause of your pet's problem.

In your case, either your doctor was not sure of what was wrong with your chinchilla or that information was not effectively communicated to you. From your description, this does sound like a dental problem. Overgrown teeth, sometimes associated with abscesses, are common problems in chinchillas. Not eating, dried saliva, losing weight are frequent signs associated with dental disease.

Please visit the doctor again, have the doctor look in your chinchilla's mouth and give you an idea if dental disease is present and the extent of it. In the meantime, you can assist feed your chinchilla with soft food that can be placed into the mouth with a syringe. Make sure your chinchilla can swallow before giving more than one syring-full of food. You can use a variety of foods including a gruel made up of crushed chinchilla pellets, or hays and grasses and vegetables or commercially available products that are made into gruels. Some people use baby food products containing vegetables and no sugars. But this is only temporary. Your chinchilla needs help immediately before it gets any sicker