

Treating Abscesses In Guinea Pigs

The causes of abscesses in guinea pigs and how to treat them.

By Karen Rosenthal, DVM, DABVP

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Q: I've got two female guinea pigs that are 2 1/2 years old. We adopted them from my daughter's primary school. One just had an abscess removed that was on the outside of her neck down her jaw line. It was quite a nasty one that was cut and drained. She had anaesthetic and didn't come around naturally and was given the reversal injection six hours later. By the next morning she was walking around. She wasn't able to eat for about a week before they operated, and she has lost quite a lot of weight. She finished her antibiotic four days after the surgery.

She is still not able to eat solids (four days later). She is keen to try, but doesn't seem to have the strength in her mouth to rip and tear. I'm syringe-feeding her with fruit and veggies that I've juiced. She feels very sorry for herself and is very quiet. I introduce her sister for a few hours in the evening but then separate them day and night as her sister wants to lick the wound. At the moment I've got the poor guinea pig on blankets and towels in her indoor hutch in the house so I can keep an eye on her. Am I expecting too much too early, or should she be able to eat solids by now? The vet isn't a small pet vet but thought my guinea pig should be eating, although she did say it was a big abscess.

A: Most abscesses in guinea pigs cannot be treated like those in dogs and cats. The abscesses in guinea pigs need to be entirely removed, not just opened and drained. This is because the material in the guinea pig abscess is very thick and won't easily come out on its own. If it is not removed entirely at surgery, it often just stays in the guinea pig and continues to cause problems. The guinea pig still has an infection at the site of the abscess, it is still painful, and the abscess still needs to be entirely removed at surgery.

Unfortunately, antibiotics will not cure this problem, even with drainage at surgery. The entire abscess should be removed and then the antibiotic given to the guinea pig.

Two other issues might concern your guinea pig. First, abscesses near the jaw can be associated with abnormal teeth. Dental disease is common in guinea pigs. If a tooth is diseased, this can cause an abscess along the jaw. In these cases, to best help the guinea pig, not only should the abscess be removed but the diseased tooth should be removed, too. If the tooth problem is not addressed, then the abscess never gets better.

Finally, the other issue is not of the abscess itself but of the liver. When a guinea pig does not eat for a couple of days, liver disease might occur. This is technically termed "hepatic lipidosis." This means that fatty tissue invades the normal liver and causes disease. When a guinea pig does not eat, the liver becomes abnormal. These changes to the liver can make a guinea pig not want to eat.

So, right now, your guinea pig might not be doing well because:

1. All of the abscess was not removed
2. A diseased tooth is also present
3. The liver is abnormal

The best thing I can tell you is to find another veterinarian who knows guinea pig medicine so that person can determine which of these problems exist in your guinea pig.