

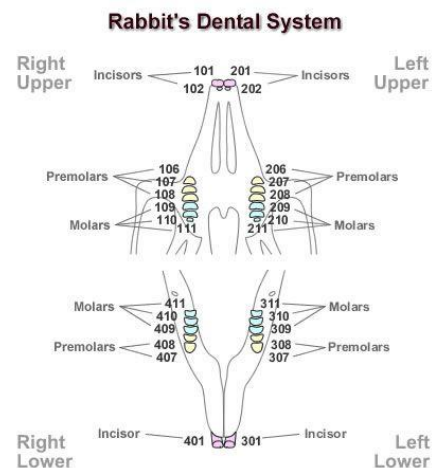
# The JAMESON QUEEN ANIMAL HOSPITAL

## How to Assess the Health of a Rabbit's Teeth

Rabbits (as well as guinea pigs and chinchillas) have open rooted teeth that continue to grow throughout life. The chewing of grass hay keeps the teeth ground to normal orientation. Pellets break apart easily and take little time to chew, making them poor tooth grinders. The incisors are easily examined but the cheek teeth (“molars”) are difficult to examine and are more commonly incriminated in dental disease.

A detailed oral cavity examination is essential to access the teeth of rabbits. This is especially important when a rabbit appears to have signs of discomfort or illness related to dental issues/disease. The signs can be as subtle as being slower to eat, being more selective about food, dropping food out of mouth, a dirty hind end, to more obvious signs like drooling, teeth grinding, a bulging eye, or cessation of eating.

In the exam room, an otoscope cone (usually used to look in the ears!) is used to examine the teeth. But, this technique in the awake patient stimulates chewing movement, making a thorough examination of the entire mouth impossible.



With the anesthetized rabbit, using specialized equipment to hold open the mouth makes for a better exam, but again with the small deep mouth of the rabbit, getting a good view of all the teeth, especially in the back of the mouth, is still difficult.

The best way to examine the oral cavity in rabbits is with a rigid endoscope. An endoscope is defined as an instrument that can be introduced into the body to give a view of its internal parts – in this case, the oral cavity or mouth – This instrument is attached to a video screen which illuminates and magnifies the images, making minute details visible.

When looking in the mouth, only the teeth above the gingiva (gums) are examined. It is also important to examine the “roots” of the teeth. To do this, we use radiographs (X-rays). X-rays are important for the diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment of difficult cases of acquired dental disease. Digital radiography is used to obtain very detailed, sharp images. Anesthetic is needed to obtain proper positioning and to minimize stress for the rabbit.

Dental disease in the rabbit continues to be one of the most common problems seen by veterinarians. By using proper examination techniques – oral endoscopy and radiology – to diagnose dental disease we increase the possibility of effective treatment and control.