

Camelid Dentistry

Most people know that taking care of their cat, dog, or horses teeth is important, but often overlooked are teeth of llamas and alpacas. Camelids can have dental problems that can lead to pain, infection, malnutrition, weight loss, poor production or other problems. This document briefly discusses what to look out for regarding your llama or alpaca's dentition.

Basics

The dentition consists of (each side) 3 molars and 1-2 premolars, (or cheek teeth) 3 lower incisors, and fighting teeth. They do not have upper incisors (excluding fighting teeth), instead they have a dental pad. Fighting teeth are sharp teeth behind the incisors, used for fighting with other camelids. They have hypsodont teeth, or teeth that erupt continuously from the gum line, and as they chew the teeth wear down. This growth and wear should be in balance.

Poor Conformation

When the growth and wear are not in balance, usually due to poor conformation, teeth may become overgrown, maloccluded (not lined up properly), or develop long sharp enamel points. These teeth may cause significant problems chewing. We often see maloccluded incisors (front lower teeth) in camelids. We see these teeth sticking out the front of the animals lips. This makes it difficult for the animal toprehend food. Maloccluded cheek teeth are less obvious; we will often see trouble eating, dropping feed, or weight loss.

Abscesses

Another common problem for camelids are tooth root abscesses. This happens when an infection travels to the root of a tooth and causes a painful pocket of pus. Signs that an animal has a tooth root abscess include swelling or pus along the jaw, trouble eating or weight loss.

Dentistry

Many of these problems can be treated with veterinary dentistry. Maloccluded incisors are easily identified and should be trimmed regularly by your veterinarian. This trimming allows the teeth to meet up with the dental pad and improve food prehention and chewing. Fighting teeth are often trimmed to avoid damage between animals when fighting. These teeth are easily trimmed to blunt the sharp crown of the tooth. Molars can be checked during annual exams, or sooner if a problem is noted with the animal. Any signs of tooth root abscesses or trouble eating should be addressed immediately. Depending on the severity and duration of the problem, treatment may vary from filing down overlong teeth to antibiotics to surgical correction.

Please do not hesitate to call us with any questions or concerns regarding your camelid's teeth.