

Small Ruminant Dentistry

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

Basics

The dentition consists of (each side) 3 molars and 3 premolars, (or cheek teeth) and 4 lower incisors. They do not have upper incisors; instead they have a dental pad. 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 or inappropriate feed substrate, teeth may become overgrown, maloccluded (not lined up properly), or have long sharp enamel points. These teeth may cause significant pain or difficulty chewing followed by trouble eating, dropping feed, or weight loss.

Abscesses

Another common problem for small ruminants 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.

Teeth should 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 and surgical correction.

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