Dental Malocclusion in Guinea Pigs

Slobbers is the condition where the fur under the jaw and down the neck remains wet from constant drooling of saliva. The primary cause for this condition is overgrowth of the guinea pig’s premolars and/or molars. Most often this occurs in older guinea pigs, over 2 to 3 year old, and usually involves the premolars. The overgrowth is due to improper alignment of the teeth when chewing, which doesn’t allow proper wearing down of the constantly growing cheek teeth. Some causes of malpositioned teeth include genetic predisposition, jaw trauma, improper diet and excess selenium in the diet. The overgrown tooth causes injury to and entrapment of the guinea pig’s tongue resulting in an inability to chew and shallow food, drooling down the chin and neck, and subsequent weight loss.

Diagnosis is confirmed by visual examination of the mouth by a qualified veterinarian. Correction of the problem involves trimming or filing of the overgrown teeth, usually requiring general anesthesia. Dental work in the mouth of a guinea pig is difficult due to the extremely small mouth opening, thus requiring specialized dental instruments. A correction of the diet may also be in order if an elevated selenium level is suspected. In addition, force feedings, analgesics and antibiotics may be necessary for recovery.

There is no permanent solution or correction to this problem. Periodic trimming or filing of the teeth is usually necessary. Guinea pigs with this problem should not be bred since dental malocclusion is often hereditary.