

## FEEDING THE DONKEY WITH DENTAL PROBLEMS

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**THE DONKEY  
SANCTUARY**

Donkeys with dental issues require specialist feeding which often requires major changes to feeding and management. All donkeys should have a dental examination with a gag at least once a year. Below are tips on feeding animals with dental disease safely whilst avoiding other problems such as colic and laminitis:

### THINGS YOU SHOULD DO

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- Do assess the donkey's ability to chew long fibres (hay, straw and haylage).
- Do take in to account the donkey's consumption of bedding (straw), if the donkey tries to eat bedding that it can't manage advise a change to non-edible wood shavings.
- Provide a good quality, soft hay if the donkey's teeth allow it.
- Donkeys with very poor teeth may need all long fibres replacing – use short chopped products designed as hay replacers.
- Feed according to body condition, donkeys with poor teeth are often still overweight!
- Feed 'little and often' to ensure donkeys are trickle feeding as they would in the wild, ie. ad lib feeding of hay replacers.
- Assess grazing management, very short or fibrous grazing may be difficult to eat, restricted areas of medium length grass may be more appropriate in some cases.
- If the donkey has had extensive dental work consider using soaked high fibre nuts in the 3-7 days afterwards to encourage sustained energy intake.



Dropping partially chewed food (quidding) is a sure sign of poor dentition.

### THINGS YOU SHOULD AVOID

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- Avoid all cereal based feeds, donkeys can be maintained and encouraged to gain weight on fibre based products without the need for inappropriate cereal feeds.
- Don't feed dry feeds, always make sure they are damp, donkeys with dental problems will often choke on feeds that are dry as they are swallowed whole rather than chewed.
- Don't provide very fibrous alfalfa products as hay replacers as they are too difficult to chew.
- Don't feed unmanageable treats e.g. chopped carrots/apples, these are better grated or puréed.

## POSSIBLE DIETS

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- Long fibre forages may need supplementing or completely replacing depending upon the severity of the problem.
- Donkeys able to manage some hay but that are not maintaining weight can be provided with supplementary feeds, we have successfully used the following:
- Soaked high fibre nuts (Spillers High Fibre Nuts and Saracens Donkey Diet)
- Speedi Beet (made by British Horse Feeds) – excellent as a top dressing for high fibre nuts to increase palatability
- Fibre Beet (made by British Horse Feeds) – high calorie alfalfa-based product, excellent as a bucket feed for very underweight animals
- Mollichaff Donkey, Mollichaff Hoofkind or Spillers Happy Hoof– chaff products that can be used as a sole bucket feed or to mix with above
- TopChop Zero - very low calorie chaff useful for helping overweight donkeys lose weight, made from chopped straw so may be more fibrous than other chops therefore may not be suitable for donkeys with severe dental disease. Mix with forage balancer (below) for a complete feed
- Feed Balancer – Top Spec Donkey Forage Balancer (for ideal/overweight donkeys) or Top Spec Comprehensive (for underweight donkeys) may be good additions to the diet for elderly donkeys with poor teeth that are on a forage based diet. The balancer may need soaking to make it easier to eat.



For donkeys unable to manage any long fibre – use short chopped products designed as hay replacers. We have successfully used the following:

- Mollichaff Hoofkind or Spillers Happy Hoof – feed to underweight / geriatric animals, provide 2 – 3 kg per day to satisfy appetite
- Mollichaff Donkey – more suitable for ideal weight or overweight animals, provide 2 – 3 kg per day to satisfy appetite.
- TopChop Zero - great for overweight donkeys as very low in energy. Feed adlib and mix with a balancer to make a complete feed.
- Short chopped hay replacers can be fed in conjunction with the bucket feeds outlined above

If you need further advice or information please do not hesitate to contact us on 01395 578222 or by email [nutrition@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk](mailto:nutrition@thedonkeysanctuary.org.uk)

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The Donkey Sanctuary was founded by Dr Elisabeth Svendsen MBE in 1969.

The Donkey Sanctuary (registered charity number 264818) and its sole corporate trustee, The Donkey Sanctuary Trustee Limited (Company number 07328588) both have their registered office at Slade House Farm, Sidmouth, EX10 0NU.

Incorporating: The Elisabeth Svendsen Trust for Children and Donkeys (EST); The International Donkey Protection Trust (IDPT).

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