

Poochie is just now three years old and lives most of her time inside a house she shares with her human companions. She does enjoy romps in the backyard and especially enjoys getting into the flower garden and nibbling on the many varieties of flowers growing there. She has had no health problems in her past according to Sharie, her primary caretaker and again according to Sharie, the one family member Poochie loves most.

Can you guess what type of creature Poochie might be? Would it help if her name was Thumper or Harvey or Bugs Bunny? That's right; Poochie is a member of the lagomorph group of mammals, specifically a rabbit.

Sharie is concerned about Poochie and rightfully so as she has developed a swelling or mass on the left side of her face toward the neck. Sharie says the area is fairly firm to the touch and Poochie acts as if there is pain when that touch occurs.

I can hear all you loyal readers now, in unison saying that Poochie needs a veterinary visit and I could not agree more. There is little doubt in my mind that Poochie's problem is not going to resolve itself and frankly, depending on the cause, it may be difficult to bring about resolution even with appropriate veterinary intervention.

A couple of potential causes spring to mind from reading Sharie's description of Poochie's facial swelling. Both of them involve abscesses but each is from a different underlying disease process.

Abscesses on the face of rabbits more specifically along the jaw line, can result from dental disease. Yes, rabbits get dental disease too. When one or more molars in the mouth of a rabbit are compromised by bacteria infecting the area where the tooth or teeth attach to the bone, an abscess or pus pocket can develop. Left unchecked, these abscesses bulge out the side of the face with increasing volumes of pus. These infections, as one might imagine, are very uncomfortable and can lead to a decrease in appetite which in turn can progress to death. From Sharie's description, I am not able to pin point the location of Poochie's "mass" but it certainly could be a tooth root abscess.

Another possibility causing Poochie's problem, assuming it is an abscess, is infection within the middle or inner ear that causes an abscess to rupture out under the skin on the side of the face. These usually start from a bacteria getting into the middle ear through the Eustachian tube. This tube runs from the throat to the ear to allow for equalizing air pressure on both sides of the ear drum.

Either of these two causes for an abscess on the side of a rabbit's face can be treatable, but the treatments are involved and sometimes difficult with resolution often times being elusive. The first step is a diagnosis to determine what might be the underlying cause. This then allows us to tailor the treatment protocol appropriately.

There are other possibilities causing Poochie's facial swelling. Though far less common, there can be tumors that arise from areas on the face or from underlying tissue of the face. A thorough evaluation and appropriate diagnostics will give us the answer.