

Omnivores

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What are omnivores?
- 2) Which animals are omnivores?
- 3) What features do omnivorous mammals have in common?





Omnivores

Omnivores are animals that eat both plants and other animals to survive. Their digestive systems are able to handle fibrous plant matter as well as meat.

Many classes of animals are omnivorous.

Humans for example are omnivorous. We eat a variety of foods that are made from plants. We eat the leaves, roots, seeds, nuts and fruits of many plants and trees. We can also eat meat.

Many large mammals, such as bears, eat both meat and plants such as fruit, berries and grass.

Birds such as emus and cassowaries eat seeds as well as insects and other small creatures that may be available. These birds also swallow pebbles to help grind up their food in their 'gizzard', a strong muscular stomach.

Many water birds are also omnivorous, eating roots and sea grasses as well as small crustaceans and worms.

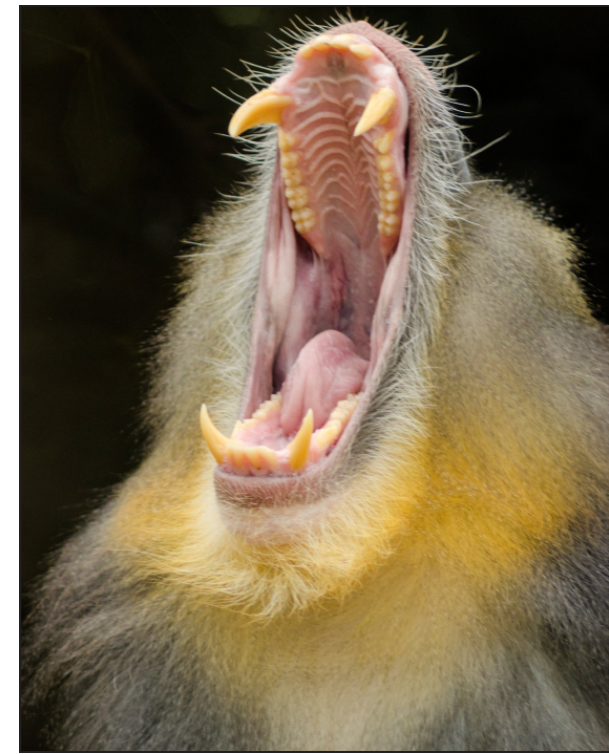


Teeth of Omnivorous Mammals

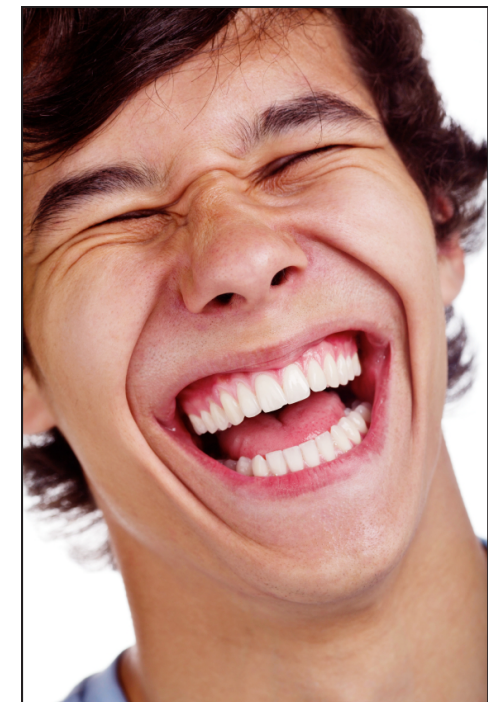
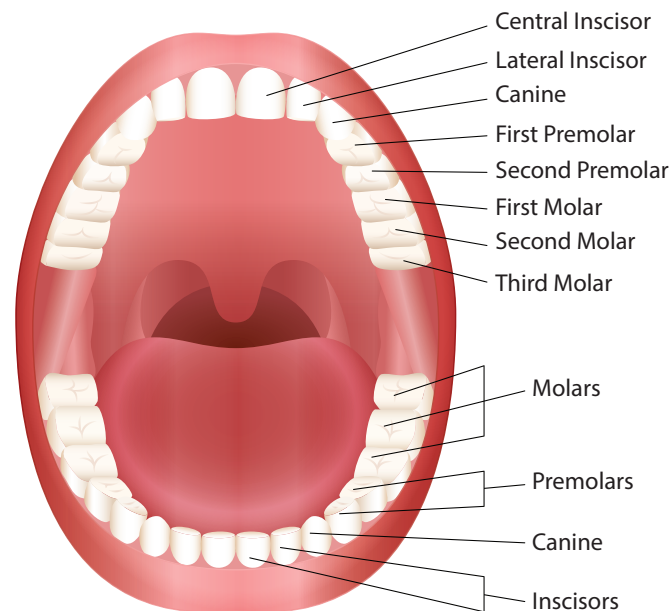
Omnivorous mammals have teeth that are well adapted to crushing fibrous plant materials, as well as tearing meat. They have a combination of sharp cutting teeth and flat grinding teeth. The shape and size depends on the diet of the species of animal.

Most omnivores have canine teeth (long pointy teeth) used for tearing flesh, incisors used for grabbing, slicing and tearing and large flat topped molars used for grinding. Humans have each of these types of teeth as do many other mammals.

You can usually tell the difference between omnivorous and carnivorous animals by comparing their teeth. The molars of carnivorous animals have sharp ridges that aid in cutting. The molars of omnivorous animals are flatter to aid the grinding process.



Mandrills eat plants as well as insects, small reptiles and amphibians.



Carnivore or Omnivore?

Bears have very sharp canine teeth. They are ferocious hunters so you would think they were carnivores. Even though they do eat meat most bears are actually omnivores.

They eat a selective range of vegetation, roots and berries as well as hunting for fish and other animals. Their incisors and canine teeth can easily tear through meat and their molars are well adapted to grind fibrous plant matter. (See bear skull picture right.)

