

3. Why does it seem some animals are always chewing?

Growing up on a dairy farm, I remember wondering 'Why are some animals always chewing?' My parents used to tell me vaguely 'They are chewing their cud'. Which left to me to wonder, what exactly is 'cud'? It was difficult for my parents to explain, and even more difficult for me to understand!

Cud is a portion of food that returns from an animal's stomach to the mouth to be chewed for the second time. Cud is produced during a digestive process called rumination. Cattle, deer, sheep, goats and antelope are some examples of animals that chew their cud. When cud-chewing animals eat their food, some of the food is stored in a special pouch within its stomach. It later regurgitates this stored food, or cud, and begins to chew it again.

This may sound unappealing, but it provides this animal a way of getting the most nutrients from their food and also helps prevent hunger. Some animals, such as llamas and goat cud chew all day long. Because of constant cud chewing, these animals also have higher instances of dental problems. Many of these animals will lose teeth and if this happens, it makes cud chewing a little more difficult. Regardless of whether they have teeth or not, they always chew their cud.

Animals that chew their cuds are referred to as ruminants. Ruminants are herbivores, meaning their diets consist of mainly plant material. Ruminants have multiple compartments in their stomachs which allow them to store and digest their food in this special way.

Now I know why it seems some animals are always chewing!

Sources:

Blurtit.com

<http://wildlife.blurtit.com/q354385.html>

Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruminant>