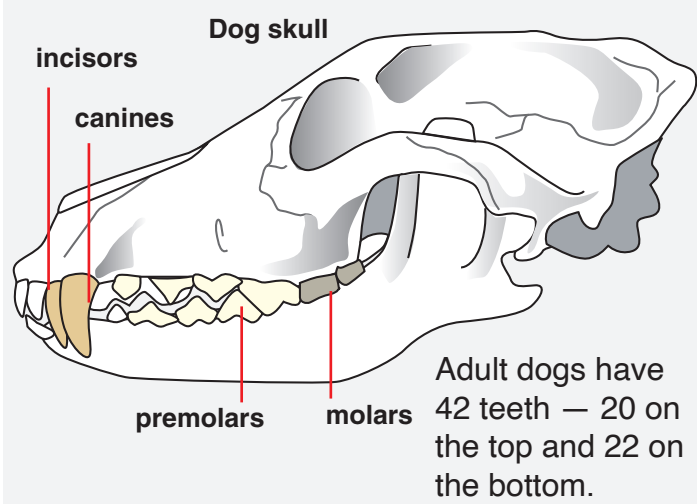


COMPARING TEETH

Teeth can tell scientists a lot about a person or animal. Some **odontologists** combine the roles of dentist and forensic scientist to solve crimes. **Anthropologists** use teeth to understand ancient people. **Paleontologists** examine the shapes of fossilized teeth to identify creatures and learn more about their diets. With a single tooth, a paleontologist can identify the animal it belongs to.

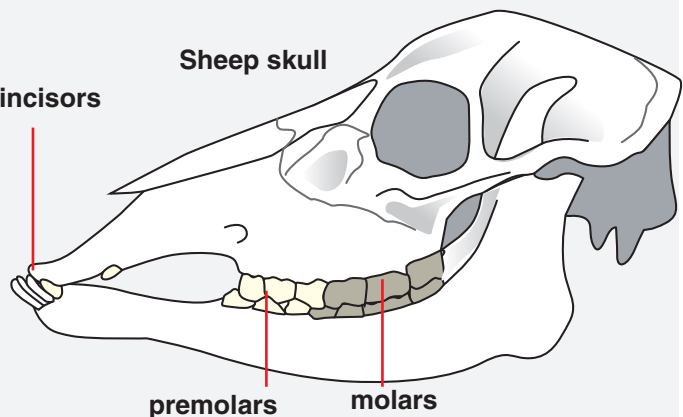
Carnivores

Carnivores such as lions and tigers are meat-eaters. They have long, pointed canines for holding and tearing food, sharp incisors for cutting and nibbling, premolars for cutting, holding and shearing, and very few molars at the back for grinding.



Herbivores

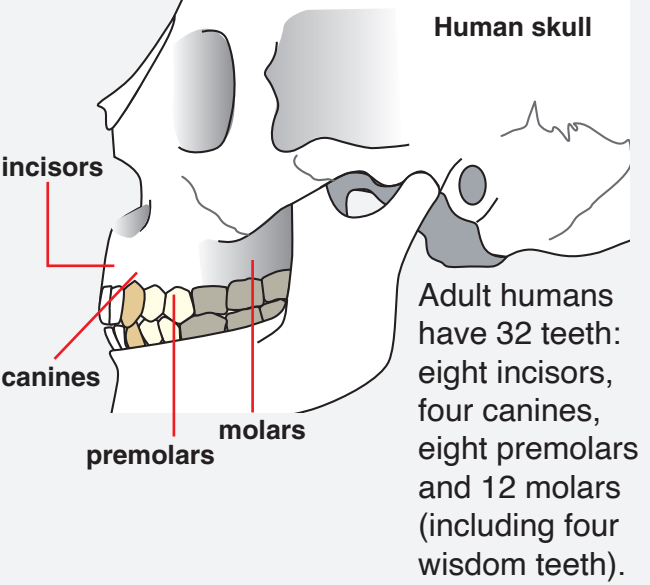
Herbivores eat plants. They have sharp incisors and wider, flatter molars. They do not have any canines. Many herbivores, including horses and cows, have jaws that are capable of moving sideways.



Sheep have eight permanent incisors in the lower front jaw and 24 molars. Sheep have no teeth in the front part of the upper jaw, which consists of a dense, hard, fibrous pad.

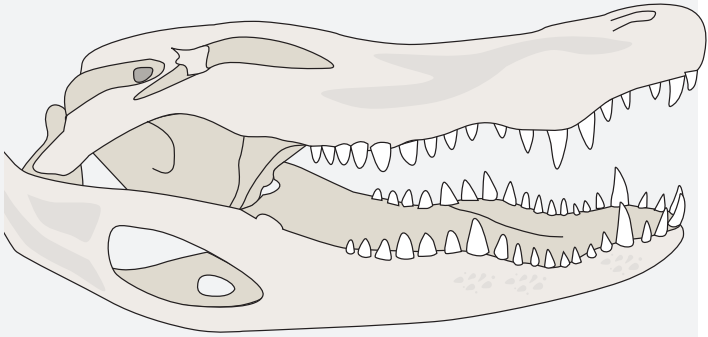
Omnivores

Omnivores, including raccoons, opossums, bears and humans, are animals that consume both plant and animal material. Most omnivores have incisors, canines and molars.

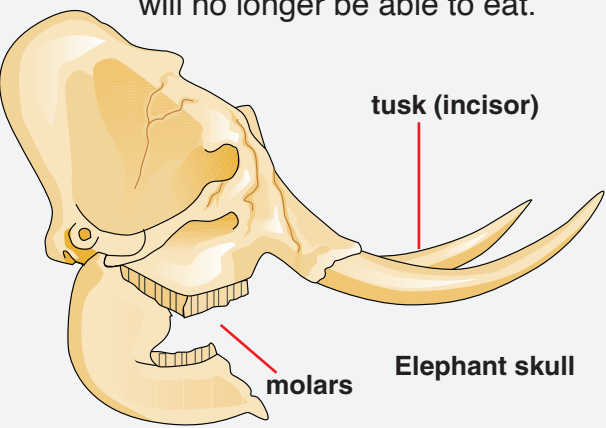


Other tooth shapes

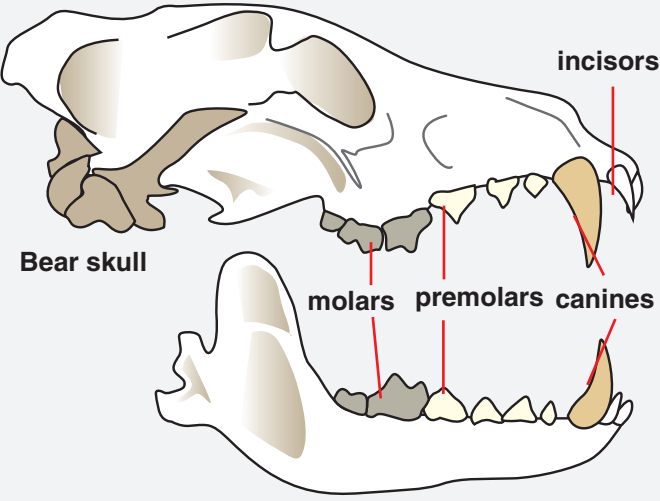
Alligators are carnivorous. They have no molars for crushing and grinding food; they swallow their food whole. Instead, a mature alligator has 80 conical teeth. Lost teeth are replaced. An alligator may go through 2,000 to 3,000 teeth in its lifetime.



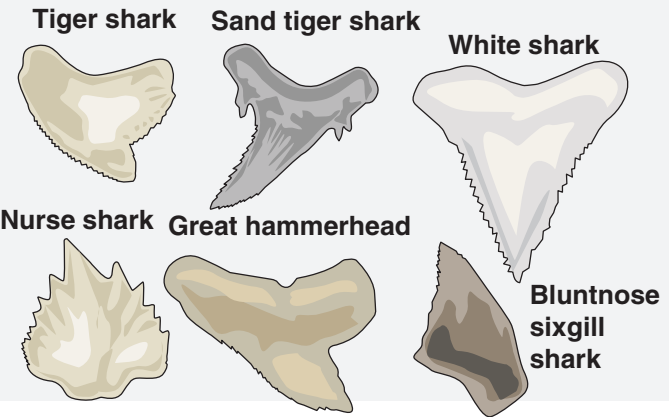
An **elephant's** tusk is actually a tooth — an incisor — that has evolved into a different type of tool, often used for defense. Its molars grow in from the back of the jaw. In its lifetime, an elephant grows six sets of molars. Over time, as they wear down, new molars move to the front. When the last set of molars wears down (at 50 to 70 years of age), the animal will no longer be able to eat.



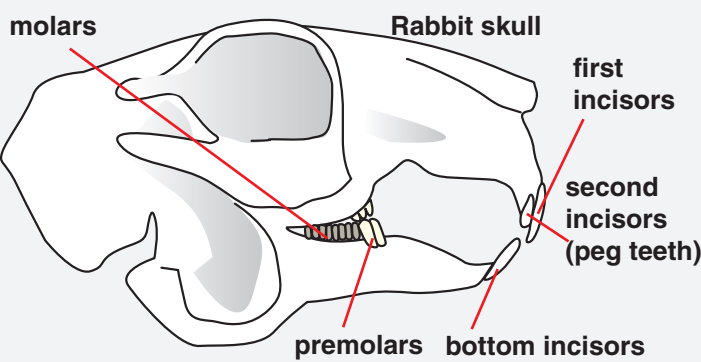
The **North American grizzly bear** has canine teeth up to 2.5 inches (6.4 cm) long. Generally, bears have 12 incisors, four canines, 10 premolars and 16 molars. Bear teeth are not very sharp. The power of the bear's bite comes from its jaw, not its teeth.



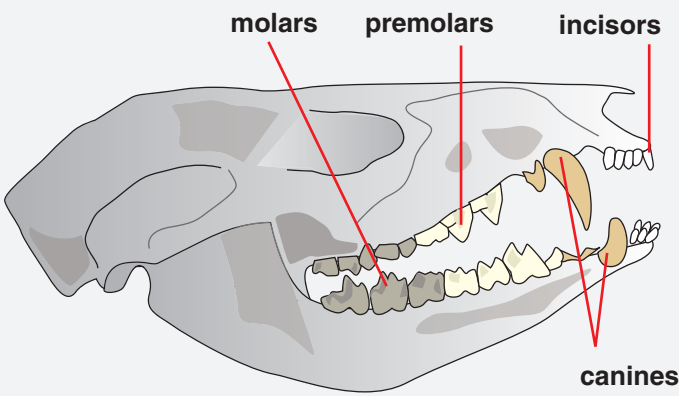
Shark teeth come in many shapes. Like the alligator's, a shark's teeth are continually replaced when lost. A lemon shark may shed more than 30,000 teeth in its lifetime.



Rabbits need to chew constantly to wear down their incisors, both top and bottom — these teeth never stop growing. They chew with a sideways motion, not up and down.



The **opossum** has 50 strong, sharp teeth. Hoping to discourage potential predators, these nonaggressive animals bare their teeth, hoping to appear intimidating.



SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://en.wikipedia.org>; <https://www.floridamuseum.ufl.edu>; <https://www.miamicosmeticdentalcare.com>; <https://www.americastoothfairy.org>; <https://mnch.uoregon.edu>; <https://www.bbc.co.uk>