

A silhouette illustration of a savanna landscape at sunset. On the left, a large acacia tree stands prominently. In the center, two giraffes are shown in profile, facing each other. To the right, two smaller antelope-like animals are also in profile, facing each other. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that transitions into a blue and purple sky with scattered clouds. The foreground is a dark silhouette of grass.

**Carnivore,  
Herbivore or  
Omnivore?**

How do you tell whether mammals are carnivores, herbivores or omnivores?



There are a number of clues that will give you the answer...

# Teeth

The first feature you should look at is their teeth. An animal has teeth that are suited to their particular diet.

Carnivores have long, sharp canine teeth next to their front incisors. These teeth are designed to grab on to their prey. Their molars also have a sharp cutting edges for tearing into the flesh of their prey.

Herbivores have flat molars to grind plant matter. Their incisors are designed to clip grass and their back molars are flat for grinding plant material.

Omnivores have a combination of sharp canine teeth for tearing and flat molars for grinding plant material.

Some herbivores and omnivores have long incisors that are used for gnawing through hard nut cases and bark.



# Eyes

The second clue lies in the eyes.

A carnivore needs to hunt to survive. Their bodies have features that help them be effective hunters.

Carnivores have eyes located towards the front of their head. This makes it easier for them to stalk and hunt down their prey.

Herbivores bodies, on the other hand, have features that help their defence from predators.

Herbivores have eyes that are located towards the sides of their head. This eye position gives them a wider peripheral view. It helps them to see when predators are approaching from behind, giving them a chance to flee.



# Feet

The third feature you should look at are the feet.

Carnivores and omnivores need to be able to creep up on their prey without them hearing them. Carnivorous and omnivorous mammals have soft pads on their feet to muffle the sound of their footsteps.

Herbivores need to be able to run away, as fast as possible, in order to escape from a predator. Their feet often have hard hooves to protect them from rough ground. This gives them a better chance of out-running a predator.

However, not all herbivores have hard hooves. Elephants, camels, rhinoceroses, kangaroos and rabbits all have padded feet.



# Claws or Hands

The final feature you should look for is the presence of claws or hands.

Carnivores and omnivores have claws or hands that they use for climbing, for hunting, for grabbing and holding onto their prey.

Cats have claws that have an amazing feature. They are retractable, extending only when they want to use them. (However, the cheetah, the fastest of the big cats, have semi-retractable claws as they need them to be extended to provide better grip when they are running.)

Cats also have a dew claw at the side of their foot that is useful in holding onto prey.

Herbivores have no need for claws as they do not hunt.

