

RABBIT HEALTH

Unlike cats or dogs, rabbits do not require regular vaccinations in the United States, however, it is critical to examine your rabbit frequently for signs of illness or changes in health. Because they are prey animals, rabbits will often hide signs of illness until it is too late. If you are noticing symptoms, it is most likely a medical emergency and requires veterinary attention immediately.

Gastrointestinal

Causes of gut stasis (lack of movement in the gut) include fur ingestion and lack of fiber in their diet (which is why unlimited hay is so important). Like cats, rabbits constantly groom themselves and ingest their fine fur; unlike cats, rabbits cannot vomit to remove the fur mass. Seek a vet immediately if your rabbit has a lack of appetite for more than 24 hours!

Watch bunny's feces daily for any reduction of size or lack of output. The best treatment is prevention: unlimited hay and plenty of exercise.

It may seem gross, but rabbits' specialized digestive systems produce a form of feces that is meant to be eaten. The feces they eat are known as cecotropes and are a special kind of poop different from regular rabbit feces. They are softer, stickier, and smaller. Cecotropes are full of nutrients that are produced in the cecum and the only way for the rabbit to benefit from these nutrients is to eat the cecotropes.

Teeth

Rabbit teeth can grow an inch per month! Rabbits must constantly wear down both incisors and molars. Hay, dried apple branches, untreated wood toys, and thick cardboard are all good for keeping teeth short. Problems arise when teeth grow out of alignment. Some rabbits may need periodic trimming of their teeth. Tooth problems should be suspected whenever appetite is reduced, if the chin is continuously moist or there is mouth drooling, or when there is excess water drinking.

Weepy Eye

Unlike most animals, rabbits have only one duct draining the eye and this is easily blocked by infection or tear debris; this can result in a weepy eye and fur loss. The problem may also worsen from unsanitary conditions. Prompt veterinary care is necessary to keep the blockage from becoming permanently closed due to scarring.

A runny eye is also a fairly common symptom of dental problems. Bunny teeth can sometimes grow up into their skull and will cause watery eyes.



Signs of aging

- Begin appearing at 5-8 years old
- Slowing down
- Changes in fur
- Changes in mobility
- Weight loss or gain
- Loss of muscle mass
- Average life span is 8-14 years
- A well cared for rabbit can enjoy many happy senior years

Behaviors of an unwell rabbit to watch for

Rabbits' instincts are to hide signs of illness; they often show little outward sign of being unwell until they are very sick. The first hint of potential illness are subtle changes in your rabbit's behavior and routine that make you feel "something's not quite right". If you notice a change you are worried about, call your vet to set up an appointment.

Some health issues should be treated as an emergency and you'll need to call your vet (day or night) and go straight there:

- Unresponsive
- Difficulty breathing
- Not eating/pooping
- Diarrhea
- Flystrike
- Trauma
- Bleeding
- Seizure

Changes to Grooming

- Soiled or dirty fur, dirty ears, excessive scratching, chewing fur, wet fur around eyes, chin or bottom.

Changes to Activity

- Less active than normal, slower to greet you, aggressive, spending less time playing, exploring or interacting.

Changes to Movement

- Limping, stumbling, dragging back legs, uncoordinated, tilting to one side, reluctant to move.

Changes to Eating Habits

- A change in food preferences, only eating favorite foods, eating less, dropping food, chewing oddly.
- Not eating at all is an emergency.

Changes to Toilet Habits

- Losing litter training, increased urinating, small or odd shaped droppings.
- Diarrhea or producing no droppings are emergencies.

Stomach Pressing (Pain)

- Pressing the stomach to the floor, restlessness, and unable to find a comfortable position to sit or lie in.

Signs of Pain

- Sitting huddles/hunched up, eyes tense or semi-closed, reluctant to move, may grind their teeth.

Seizure

- Rapid twitching, kicking, or shaking. May stagger or appear disorientated but not necessarily fall over.

Unresponsive

- Laying on side limp, floppy, or cold. Some rabbits sleep in this position but will act normally when disturbed.

Difficulty Breathing

- Mouth breathing (rabbits usually breath through their nose), laboured breathing, wheezing, blue lips.

