

# COMMON PET RABBIT DISEASES

## Dental disease

A rabbit's teeth are essential to its health and ability to eat properly. Rabbit teeth are open rooted, meaning they continue to grow during the life of the animal. As long as there is a normal bite, the teeth will keep themselves in alignment. Genetic pre-disposition to malocclusion of teeth has been postulated in many cases, as has lack of hay / fiber in the diet. Infections of the tooth root or bony structures of the mouth may cause the teeth to be out of alignment.

### *Symptoms*

1. Anorexia
2. Seeing lower and/or upper incisors outside of lips
3. Presence of wetness under the chin and lower jaw (slobbers)
3. Un-explained weight loss

### *Diagnosis*

1. Visibly seeing the 'overgrown' incisors outside of the lips
2. Veterinary examination of cheek teeth with a speculum or scope
3. Xrays

### *Treatment*

1. Maloccluded incisors should be removed by extraction of both upper and lower incisors
2. Maloccluded cheek teeth should be clipped and filed by a veterinarian well experienced with rabbit dentistry





#### *Prevention*

1. Offer plenty of hay in the diet
2. Keep rabbit from chewing on metal
3. Have yearly exams by a veterinarian knowledgeable in rabbit care

**Encephalitozoon cuniculi infection** - a protozoal infection that may involve the central nervous system or the urinary tract.



#### *Symptoms*

1. 'Wry Neck' or head tilt is usually the first sign
2. Circling in lesser cases
3. Kidney infection

#### *Diagnosis*

1. Blood tests to detect antibody levels are available, but interpretation as to the cause of the symptoms is often difficult and involves testing for Pasteurella as well
2. Biopsy of the kidney in renal disease cases
3. Necropsy

#### *Treatment*

1. 6-8 week therapy with fenbendazole, albendazole or oxibendazole

**GI Stasis** - Also known as trichobezoar, hair ball, or wool block. This complex disease is related to a variety of conditions including but not exclusive to ; low fiber intake, molting, stress, and poor health.

*Symptoms*

1. Anorexia
2. Diarrhea
3. Passing tiny dry stools
4. Distended doughy stomach on palpation

*Treatment*

1. Hospitalization with subq fluids, oral hydration with fluids and enzymes, pain relief medication and in some cases, gastric motility enhancing drugs
2. Increasing 'timothy hay' intake
3. Massaging the stomach or walking around with the rabbit cuddled in one's arms
4. Surgery may be used as a last ditch procedure, but failures of return to health are more common than success stories

*Prevention*

1. Feed 'timothy' hay daily and as only source of food - twice a week !
2. Let rabbit exercise daily
3. Keep environment clean and limit stress

**Parasitic diseases** - ear mites, fleas and 'bot fly' (Cuterebra larva) abscess on head, neck or legs

*Symptoms*

1. Ear mite infections are obvious by the thick crusty, flaky build up in the ear
2. Fleas can be seen with the naked eye as can the black feces (flea dirt)
3. Cuterebra infections cause a small swelling (usually around the head, eyes, neck or rear legs). The breathing pore can often be seen.

*Diagnosis*

1. Ear mites, fleas and Cuterebra are all visible with the 'trained' naked eye
2. Microscopic detection of ear mites (Psoroptes cuniculi) in scrapings from the ear

*Treatment*

1. Ear Mites - ivermectin injections given every 2 weeks for 2-3 treatments
2. Fleas - treat as one would for a cat ( Advantage has been used safely by veterinarians). Treating the environment is essential to prevent re-infestation
3. Cuterebra larval infections (BOT FLY) require careful surgical removal



#### *Prevention*

1. Check other pets in house for ear mites and fleas. Keep rabbits away from outdoor cats and or dogs
2. Cutrebra larvae live around rodent holes out doors

### **Pasteurellosis**

A common bacterial disease that affects rabbits at any age. Caused by the organism - *Pasteurella multocoda*. Symptoms are usually confined to upper and lower respiratory tract, but may cause abscesses in a variety of locations around the body. The condition has been called 'Snuffles' for years. Genetic predisposition, poor diet, unclean living conditions and stress may all play a factor in the disease and the rabbits ability to fight off infection.

#### *Symptoms*

1. Runny eyes and/or nose
2. Crusty discharge around nostrils clumping hair together
3. Difficulty breathing
4. Weight loss
5. Swellings around joints, under the lower jaw around the eye or the bottoms of the feet



#### *Diagnosis*

1. Bacterial culture
2. Elevated antibody level in blood tests
3. Assumption by symptoms or response to treatment
4. Xrays to detect infection in lungs or inner ear

#### *Treatment*

1. Respiratory diseases often require hospitalization with injectable antibiotics ( Baytril, Naxel, Chloramphenicol ) and nebulization therapy

2. Abscess require surgical removal ( capsule and contents ). Difficult cases may benefit from the use of antibiotic impregnated pellets inserted into the area

#### *Prevention*

1. Maintaining a clean environment without extreme swings in ambient temperature
2. Feeding a proper diet ( limited treats, some fresh greens and plenty of hay )
3. Limiting stress ( the new Black Lab puppy, over crowding, too small of a cage )

**Neoplasms (Tumors)**- Rabbits are affected by several specific types of cancer. Uterine and mammary gland cancer are both seen with regularity in adult female rabbits.



#### *Symptoms*

1. Bloody discharge from vaginal opening ( rabbits do not bleed when 'in season')
2. Hematuria (bloody urine)
3. Unexplained weight loss
4. Lumps on belly and breast of female rabbits

#### *Diagnosis*

1. Uterine adenocarcinoma is detected during surgery
2. Xray or ultrasound diagnosis of a soft tissue mass in area of uterus
3. Biopsy of mammary gland masses

#### *Treatment*

1. Spaying a rabbit with either or both types of cancer
2. Mastectomy for mammary gland tumors

#### *Prevention*

1. Spaying all female rabbits over 6 months of age