

General Rabbit Health Guide:

This guide is not intended to replace veterinarian care. Have your rabbit examined regularly.

For further information visit our website to check out our "How To Videos".



Contact us:
info@ontariorabbits.org

Website:
www.ontariorabbits.org

Last modified Mar 3rd 2013.
Copyright © 2003 Ontario Rabbit Education Organization

Ear Mites:

Symptoms: Shaking head, digging at ears, crusty/bloody scabs in the ear. In severe cases, infestation can spread to other areas of the body. *Possible Treatment:* Veterinarian administered anti-parasitic medication.

Teary eyes:

Discharge may indicate an upper respiratory infection, corneal scratch environmental irritants, blocked tear duct, or teeth problems. *Symptoms:* Matted fur around the eye, matted fur on insides of front paws. *Possible Treatment:* Examination should include a thorough molar check. Treatment may include having the tear ducts flushed and the discharge cultured or molar spurs removed. (Note: Clear discharge doesn't always indicate absence of infection!) Oral and topical antibiotics (eye ointment or drops) may be prescribed. Gently apply warm water compresses to soften matted fur and sooth the area then pat dry.

Runny nose/sneezing:

Potential respiratory infection. *Symptoms:* Wet or runny nose, sneezing, congestion, matted fur on insides of front paws. *Possible Treatment:* Veterinary examination is necessary to determine the presence of infection. In case of infection, antibiotics should be prescribed by veterinarian.

Malocclusion (misaligned teeth):

Misaligned incisors (front teeth) can grow long and pierce the tongue, roof of mouth or lips. Molars (back teeth) can develop sharp points (spurs), which can cut into the cheek or tongue and can lead to abscesses or loss of appetite. *Symptoms:* Change in eating habits (rabbit stops eating various foods or altogether), drooling, teary eyes, grinding teeth. *Possible Treatment:* Overgrown teeth need to be trimmed or filed. Severe cases may benefit from incisor removal. Have vet check molars with otoscope. Rabbit may need to be sedated for a thorough molar examination.



Toenails:

Need regular trimming every 4-6 weeks using scissor or guillotine type clippers. A blood vessel (the quick) runs lengthwise through the nail, and can be easily seen in rabbits with light coloured nails. Apply styptic powder to stop the bleeding if the quick is accidentally cut.

Sore Hocks:

Sitting on wire (especially Rex breed or overweight rabbits) or sitting on wet surfaces can cause ulcerated lesions on the rabbit's feet. *Symptoms:* Awkward movements, bald spots/scabs on bottom of feet. *Possible Treatment:* Clean lesions, apply antibiotic ointment and keep cage clean and dry. Provide a soft surface or resting board in the cage for the rabbit to sit on. Severe cases should be assessed by a veterinarian.

Fur Mites:

Usually appear on the neck or spine areas first. *Symptoms:* Dandruff, dry skin, bald spots, thinning hair, scratching, white scaly skin. *Possible Treatment:* Veterinarian administered anti-parasitic medication.

Head tilt/Wry neck:

Head tilts to one side, rabbit becomes dizzy and unbalanced and may roll over uncontrollably. Often caused by an inner ear infection, E. Cuniculi (parasite), or bacterial infection. *Possible Treatment:* Immediate veterinary care is required to determine the cause and the best form of treatment. The anti-nausea drug, Meclizine (trade names: Antivert or Bonamine), may help to control dizziness.

GI stasis (decreased gastrointestinal motility):

Serious condition! If a rabbit has only eaten or defecated a small amount in the last 12 hours, seems listless or is uninterested in food or has other noticeable behavioural changes, he needs immediate veterinary attention. *Possible Causes:* Stress, diet changes, lack of fibre, too many carbohydrates, dehydration, an underlying condition causing pain (ie: molar spur, or gas), blockage of hair and food. *Symptoms:* Loss of or decreased appetite, sitting in a hunched position, inability to get comfortable, scant/small feces, behavioural changes. *Possible Treatment:* Veterinarian should palpate stomach/intestines and may take x-rays to determine if there is a blockage. Therapy may include: fluids (sub-q or children's Pedialyte), simethicone (Gas-X), motility drugs (if no blockage is present), or enzymes.

Shedding:

Rabbits shed 4 times a year, alternating between light shedding and heavy molts. Because rabbits cannot vomit, it is important to brush regularly or massage with damp hands to remove excess fur so that it is not ingested.

Fleas:

Look for black flecks or the fleas themselves moving through the fur close to the skin. *Symptoms:* Scratching, fur loss *Possible Treatment:* Some flea control products that are safe for kittens, such as Advantage (administered by a vet) can be used. *Do not use Frontline, which can be toxic to rabbits! Flea dips and flea baths should also NOT be used.*

Determining Gender:

Gender: Determining the gender of young rabbits is not easy. Don't take chances! Keep rabbits separated until an accurate gender assessment can be made. Using your index and middle finger, press gently on either side of the genital mound. Males: a curved tapered protrusion should be visible. Testicles should appear when the rabbit is approximately 10 weeks old. Females: the protrusion will resemble a slit or be more V-shaped.

Urine Burn/Scalding:

Prolonged contact with urine can cause burns to a rabbit's skin. *Possible causes:* a urinary track infection, kidney disease, spondylosis (fused vertebrae) or arthritis. *Symptoms:* Wet bottom, missing fur on bottom or red, irritated skin. *Possible Treatment:* Veterinary examination is necessary to assess cause. Keep bottom clean and dry.