

POOPING AND EATING: A Do or Die Situation

It is Not Okay for your rabbit to not eat or poop. There are many reasons why this happens, and it is important to recognize the signs and provide the proper treatment right away.

The information here is NOT to be used in place of proper veterinary care.

Explanation and Causes of Gastrointestinal (GI) Stasis

When the speed with which material moves through the gastrointestinal tract (GIT) is altered it can affect how quickly the stomach and cecum empty. This will generally decrease the appetite for both food and water, causing the body to extract the water from the stomach, which exaggerates the problem by causing the contents of the entire GI tract (food, hair from grooming, etc.) to become further dehydrated and impacted. The bunny is then unable to pass the mass of food/hair in the stomach, he or she feels full, uncomfortable and often gassy, which only adds to the “I don’t want to eat” mentality. It is a vicious cycle, and the sooner it is recognized and treated, the better off the rabbit will be. ***A rabbit in GI Stasis is often said to have a “hairball”—and while this may be a part of the problem, the hair/food mass in the gut is a RESULT of the stasis, not the cause.***

GI Stasis can be secondary to almost any rabbit illness or trauma, though there are some common causes, such as bad diet (too many pellets, not enough hay/fiber); too many carbohydrates or sugars in the diet; stress (moving, illness, changes in family life, grief/loss of rabbit companion, etc.); long term use of antibiotics; lack of proper exercise; injury, dental issues, or any other illness. ***Learning to recognize the signs of gut problems is very important!***

Warning Signs

- smaller than usual feces, fewer fecal pellets than usual (or none at all)
- feces strung thickly together with hair (from grooming)
- feces that vary greatly in size and shape
- on-again/off-again diarrhea
- acting as if the tummy is painful or gassy (excess stretching, yawning, restlessness, etc.)

As a general rule, if your rabbit has not eaten, drunk or pooped in six hours – call your rabbit vet! It is either already an emergency, or it will be if you wait.

What to Do If You Notice Early Signs of GI Problems

If you notice that your rabbit’s feces are strung with hair, smaller than usual, or not uniform in shape and size there are several things you can do:

- INCREASE your rabbit's fiber intake. Offer her a variety of fresh hays. Change or add hay frequently throughout the day to encourage bunny to investigate and munch.
- INCREASE produce. Soak veggies in a bowl of water and offer them to bunny to help hydrate the gut.
- INCREASE water consumption to help hydrate impacted gut. Offer your rabbit water in a crock (crops offer rabbits a more natural way of consuming water than bottles and may encourage them to drink more.)
- INCREASE your rabbit's exercise routine. If this is a "caged" rabbit, get her out to run around your house (supervised) for several hours a day. Often just getting the body going will motivate the gut to function better.
- KEEP your rabbit warm.

If your rabbit's feces do not significantly improve within six hours, or if they get worse (smaller/fewer) or stop altogether, or if her appetite diminishes, CONTACT YOUR VET IMMEDIATELY!

Tell them it is an emergency. If they cannot take the rabbit immediately, call your back-up vet or go to Petcare, the 24 hour emergency care center located at 2425 Mendocino Avenue in Santa Rosa: 707-579-3900.

Treating GI Stasis: Common Things Your Rabbit Vet May Do or Prescribe

- X-rays to see if there is an obstruction.
- Look at teeth to see if dental issues are causing pain and GI problems.
- Subcutaneous fluids injected under the skin to help hydrate the gut.
- PAIN RELIEF: Metacam, Torbutrol, Bupranex, Banamine. Pain relief for a rabbit is often *the* key to recovery.
- Antibiotics: Plagyl, Bactrim, or Baytril to help combat the overgrowth of "bad bacteria".
- Syringe Feeding (if necessary): Ask your vet to show you how to properly syringe feed your bunny. **You must be very careful not to squirt food or liquid straight back down the throat or you could get liquid into the lungs and cause more health problems for your rabbit.**

Recovery Time

BE PATIENT. The road to recovery can take time. You need to allow the therapies and medications time to do their work. It may be several days before you can see any fecal pellets, and several weeks before your bunny is completely back to normal. DO NOT STOP any medications or therapies, or change them, without first consulting your vet! When you do see your vet, if your rabbit has a companion, take the bunny along. Separation can cause stress and make matters worse.