

## Alopecia (fur loss) in rabbits

### Overview

- Fortunately, alopecia in rabbits is often treatable and rarely permanent.
- It's important to have your rabbit seen by your vet if they start losing fur, especially because some causes can be very irritating and painful.
- Book an appointment with your vet if you notice your rabbit losing fur.

### General information and causes



*This rabbit has alopecia and painful, crusty skin due to a mite problem.*

'Alopecia' is the scientific word for hair loss. Alopecia can develop in patches or as thinning fur and is a symptom of many different conditions. Some causes of alopecia in rabbits are perfectly natural, but some are not, and require treatment.

Common causes of alopecia in rabbits include:

- **Stress**
  - Stress is a very common cause of alopecia in rabbits. If your rabbit is stressed, they may start to pull their own fur out.
- **Behavioural**
  - Rabbits are sociable animals that should be kept as a pair or group. However, occasionally one rabbit will pull another's fur as an act of dominance (this is called 'barbering').
  - Sexual behaviour such as 'mounting' can also cause bald patches.
- **Fleas, mites and lice**
- **Arthritis**
  - Painful conditions such as arthritis can cause a rabbit to overgroom and pull at their own fur.
- **Skin infections**
- **Wounds and scars**
  - Alopecia is common (and sometimes permanent) around infected skin, deep wounds and scars.
- **Flystrike**
  - Flystrike is life-threatening condition caused by maggots burrowing under the skin to feed on flesh. An early symptom is alopecia around the backend.
- **Dirty bottom**
  - If your rabbit has a wet bottom for more than a few days they are very likely to develop alopecia, urine scald and infected skin.
- **Moulting**
  - Moulting and seasonal fur loss is perfectly normal. Rabbits often moult in big tufts but should not go bald.
- **Pregnancy**
  - Hormone changes during pregnancy, false pregnancy and when feeding young can cause alopecia.
  - Some rabbits pull their own fur out to nest during pregnancy. This can also happen during a false

pregnancy. As long as your rabbit doesn't make themselves bald this is normal behaviour and nothing to worry about.

- **Ringworm**
- **Tumours**
  - Certain cancers of the skin, ovaries and testicles can cause alopecia, however, this is rare.

### Symptoms to look out for

If your rabbit has alopecia, it can be helpful to check for, and tell your vet about other symptoms such as:

- Changes in behaviour
- A rash or red skin
- Bumps and scabs
- Smelly skin
- Dandruff
- Itchy skin
- Over grooming (licking and chewing more than usual)

### When to contact your vet

Contact your vet if you notice your any of rabbits losing fur. Skin problems can be uncomfortable and painful, and in most cases, the sooner they are treated, the sooner they will be back to normal.

You know your rabbits best. If you are concerned, it's always best to contact your vet.

**Am I eligible for PDSA veterinary treatment?**

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