

Weepy eyes in rabbits

Overview

Your rabbit's eyes should look shiny and clear. Weepy eyes are often a sign of a problem, whether that be an injury to the eye or a medical problem. Eye problems can be very painful, although your rabbit will always try their best to hide pain.

Take your rabbit to the vet if you notice anything wrong with their eye(s) such as weeping or discharge.



A HEALTHY RABBIT EYE. NOTICE HOW SHINY AND CLEAR THE FRONT OF THE EYE IS

Weepy eyes explained

Tears are produced by tear glands and are drained away through a tiny hole on the inside of the eyelid called a 'tear duct'. Tears protect the eyes by keeping them moist and free from dirt.

Weepy eyes nearly always indicate a problem and tend to cause a problem themselves by irritating the skin around the eye making it red, sore and prone to infection.

Causes

There are lots of reasons why a rabbit might have runny eyes:

Tooth disease

Tooth disease is a very common cause of weepy eyes in rabbits. This is because rabbits have long teeth with roots very close to their eyes. If one of their teeth grows too long, becomes inflamed or develops an infection the eye are likely to be affected.

Blocked tear ducts

The tear ducts (the tubes that drain their tears) are likely to block if something gets stuck inside them (such as a grass seed) or if your rabbit has been born with particularly narrow ducts. When tear ducts become blocked, tears can't drain away. Rabbits with short faces such as the 'lop' and dwarf breeds are especially troubled by this problem.

Infections

Infected eyes (bacterial conjunctivitis) often look sticky and develop a creamy, yellow or green discharge.

Nose, throat and lung infections can also affect the eyes. If tear ducts also become inflamed or infected they stop being able to drain tears from the eye. Rabbit 'snuffles' caused by the *Pasteurella* germ is a common infection.

Injuries

Injuries to the eye cause lots of tears to be produced – this is the body's natural response to try to protect and heal the eye.

Extra eye lashes

Occasionally, tiny eye lashes grow from the inside of a rabbit's eyelid. These little hairs constantly rub against the eye and irritate it (causing weeping). Unless these hairs are removed, they will continuously irritate. They can even cause eye ulcers which can be very serious.

When to contact your vet

Have your rabbit checked by a vet if you notice their eyes weeping. Eyes are too important to leave to chance.

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

Published: November 2018