

My rabbit isn't eating properly

Overview

Rabbits need to eat very regularly to keep their digestive system moving and their teeth healthy. Contact your vet for an appointment ASAP if your rabbit is eating less than usual.

Your rabbit will hide pain and health problems for as long as they can and for this reason it is important to take them straight to the vet if you notice any sign of them being poorly. If left for too long, eating less or nothing at all can lead to serious problems and even death.

There are many possible causes for a reduced appetite, the most common include dental disease and gut problems.

How will I know if my rabbit is eating less?

Rabbits should always be kept in pairs or groups (never alone). For this reason it can be very tricky to spot if one of your furry friends is eating less. Signs to look out for include:

- Weight loss
- Dribbling / wet chin
- Fewer or no droppings produced
- Teeth grinding (sign of pain)
- A wet or dirty bottom
- Hiding away more than usual
- Water not needing to be replaced as often as usual

Causes of a reduced appetite

Dental problems

Dental problems are very painful, overgrown teeth can stop your rabbit eating. Rabbits need to eat a high fibre diet (90% grass and hay) to keep their teeth at the correct length.

Digestive problems

A very high fibre diet is essential to keep your rabbits gut working properly. If they don't get enough fibre, their digestive system slows down and this makes them feel poorly. Eventually this can cause the guts to stop working completely (gut stasis). This is an emergency situation that can be fatal.

Diet changes

Rabbits don't cope well with sudden changes to their diet and it can cause them to stop eating. Any changes in a rabbit's diet should happen gradually.

Stress

Changes in housing and stressful situations can stop a rabbit eating. Once they stop eating, their gut slows down and it can be hard to get it going again without veterinary treatment.

Stomach ulcers

Stomach ulcers are painful patches that form in the lining of the stomach, this is a common problem in rabbits. Stomach ulcers are often caused by stress.

Infectious diseases

Diseases such as pasteurellosis (a bacteria) and myxomatosis (a virus preventable by vaccination) could make your rabbit feel unwell and stop eating.

Poisons and toxins

Poisonous plants like any plants that grow from bulbs, potato tops and oak leaves can cause serious illness.

Medications

Some medications can reduce a rabbit's appetite. Speak to your vet if they have been prescribed medication and your rabbit seems to have stopped eating.

Other

Lung disease, heart disease, kidney disease, gut blockages and tumours can all cause a decreased appetite.

When to contact your vet

Contact your vet immediately if you notice your rabbit isn't eating properly, is struggling to eat or isn't producing droppings.

You know your rabbit best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Treatment

Your vet will try and find out what is causing your rabbit to eat less loss of appetite. They will do a thorough examination may want to run some blood tests or perhaps take some X-rays to find out what is going on.

Your rabbit may need to be admitted into the veterinary hospital for intensive treatment to get them eating again. This treatment may include a drip and medications. Sadly, not all rabbits respond well to treatment. The sooner your rabbit is seen by a vet once they have shown signs of illness the better their chances of a quick recovery.

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