

Dacryocystitis in rabbits

Overview

- Dacryocystitis is inflammation of the tear ducts (also known as the nasolacrimal ducts - see diagram on p.2)
- Dacryocystitis is a common problem in pet rabbits, and can affect one or both sides.
- Weepy eyes are the most common sign of dacryocystitis.
- Treatment and outlook depends on the cause of dacryocystitis. A simple case is often easy to treat, but unfortunately, most cases involve dental disease and are much more complicated.
- Contact your vet for an appointment if you notice your rabbit has weepy or sticky eyes; never wait to see if they improve, this could lead to worse problems.



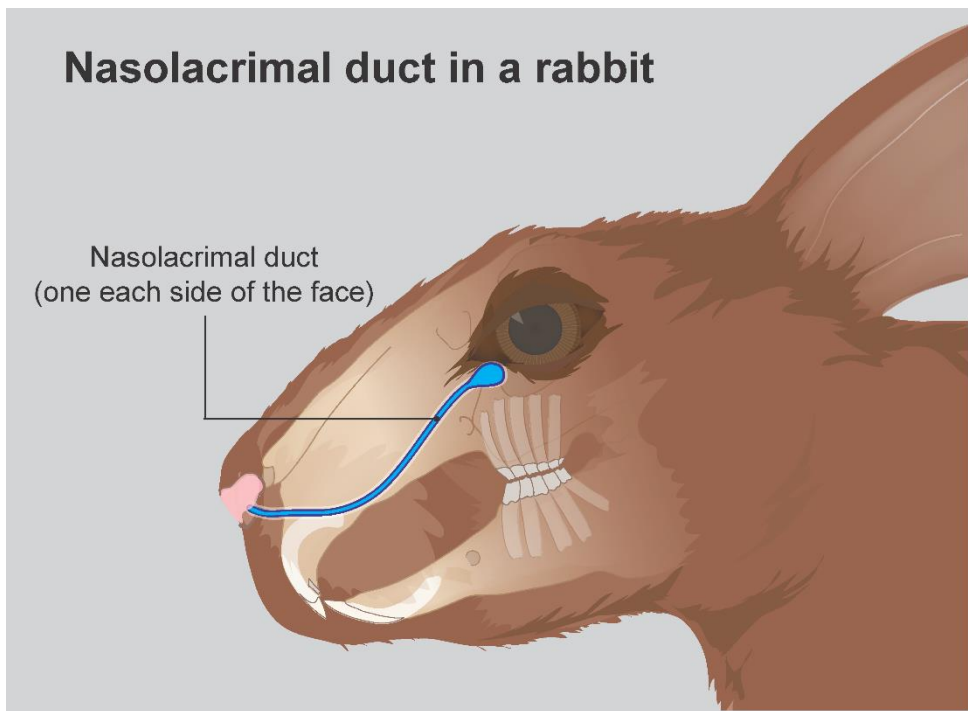
This rabbit has a white sticky discharge from his eyes due to dacryocystitis.

General information and causes

Tear ducts (nasolacrimal ducts) are tiny tubes that drain tears from the eyes into the nose (see image below). Dacryocystitis is inflammation of the tear ducts, and can develop for a few reasons:

- **Dental disease** - rabbit tear ducts run very close to their tooth roots and are easily blocked and damaged if the roots overgrow. Dental disease is by far the most common cause of dacryocystitis in rabbits.
- **Infection** - a bacterial infection inside one or both ducts will cause dacryocystitis.
- **Blockage** - rabbit tear ducts are very long and thin and get blocked very easily for example, by a small piece of grass or sludge from tears.

Dacryocystitis leads to tear overflow down the face, and often infection, which causes a white, sticky discharge from the eyes.



Tear ducts are also known as the nasolacrimal ducts.

Symptoms

Symptoms of dacryocystitis include:

- Runny eye(s)
- Infected eyes
- Red, swollen eyes
- Tear staining, sore skin and fur loss around the eyes
- A painful mouth/face
- Reduced appetite

When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice your rabbit has weepy eyes, or any signs of dacryocystitis. Never wait to see if your rabbit improves, this could make the problem much worse.

Treatment

Simple cases of dacryocystitis (not related to dental disease)

Duct flushing and medication can often cure simple cases of dacryocystitis that are unrelated to dental disease.

More complicated cases of dacryocystitis

If your rabbit's symptoms don't improve after treatment, your vet may need to investigate further. Your vet may also take a swab to check for bacteria and X-rays may be necessary, to check your rabbit's tooth roots. Unfortunately, if tooth roots are involved, your rabbit's problem will be much more difficult to treat.

Outlook

If your rabbit has a simple case of dacryocystitis, their outlook is good. However, most cases of dacryocystitis involve dental disease

and are much more difficult to cure. If the problem keeps coming back (becomes chronic), it will eventually start affecting the bones of the skull. If your rabbit is suffering from a painful case of chronic dacryocystitis, you may need to consider the difficult decision of putting them to sleep.

Prevention

The best way to prevent dacryocystitis is to keep your rabbits' teeth healthy by feeding a well-balanced diet, high in fibre. See dental disease in rabbits.

Cost

Treatment for dacryocystitis can become very expensive, especially because it's a condition that often requires ongoing care and repeat check-ups. It's important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your rabbit. There may be several treatment options, so if one doesn't work for you and your pet your vet may be able to offer another.

Consider insuring your rabbit as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

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