

Dirty bottom in a rabbit

Overview

- Rabbits are naturally clean animals that spend a lot of time grooming.
- A dirty bottom often indicates a health problem.
- A dirty bottom puts your rabbit at risk of further problems such as urine scald, skin disease and fly strike.
- Check your rabbits regularly and book an appointment with your vet if they aren't cleaning themselves properly.

General information

Rabbits normally keep themselves very clean, so if your rabbit has developed a dirty bottom, it could be a sign that something is wrong. Once your rabbit has a dirty bottom, they are at risk of serious problems such as urine scald, skin disease and flystrike (especially in summer).

Common causes include:

- **Dental disease** - dental disease can make grooming very difficult and painful (sometimes impossible) and cause diarrhoea.
- **A poor diet** - a poor diet can quickly lead to digestive problems and soft stools. Check out our feeding guide for rabbits.
- **Arthritis** - arthritis makes turning around and grooming very difficult and painful.
- **Obesity** - an overweight rabbit will have trouble reaching round to clean their back end.
- **Diarrhoea** - diarrhoea will lead to a mucky bottom.

- **A dirty environment** - if your rabbit is living in a dirty environment they will struggle to keep themselves clean and dry.
- **Urinary infections and stones** – a rabbit with ‘waterworks’ problem can get ‘urine scald’ near their bottom.



This rabbit has developed urine scald due to a dirty bottom and matted fur.

When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet as soon as you notice your rabbit has a dirty bottom, a full health check will be necessary to find out why.

Other symptoms to look out for

It may be helpful to think about whether you have noticed any other symptoms such as:

- A painful mouth
- Eating less
- Weight loss or weight gain

- Soft faeces or diarrhoea
- Poor coat condition
- Low energy/hiding away/being quieter than usual

How to clean a rabbit's dirty bottom

If you want to clean your rabbit to make them more comfortable, do it very carefully - rabbits have extremely thin skin that tears easily.

- Ask someone to carefully hold your rabbit while you are cleaning them.
- Use a small bowl or the sink. Fill it with 2-3 inches of warm water (check the temperature is okay on the underside of your wrist).
CARE: hot water may scald your rabbit.
- Only use a shampoos or products recommended by your vet.
- Hold your rabbit over or just in the water and using a sponge, soak their dirty fur. Keep soaking the area until the dirt is soft and removable.
- Gently sponge away the dirt, use a **soft** brush if necessary.
- Replace the water as often as necessary.
- Dry your rabbit using a clean dry towel, or kitchen roll. Keep your rabbit indoors, in a warm, dry environment for a few hours afterwards to ensure their fur dries out fully.
- **Never attempt to trim any clumps of dirty fur away unless you are very sure you won't accidentally cut their skin. It's very common for rabbits to suffer cuts and skin-tearing injuries while being cleaned. If in doubt, contact your vet practice for advice and help.**
- Only wash dirty patches, and never put your rabbit's head under water. Having a bath is unnatural for a rabbit and can be very stressful.

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