

CHIEF RABBIT CONCERN: My rabbit will not eat, is eating less, or has a change in its routine fecal production.

What could be happening: Our concern is that your rabbit is having a sluggish motility in the intestinal tract that can lead to dehydration and impaction of the stomach and intestinal contents, including hair and other intestinal material. This situation can be very serious

Other terms for this condition are hair balls, wool block, colic, stomach or cecal impaction, or GI stasis (gastrointestinal stasis)

What to do: Have a veterinary exam immediately for an overall examination of the teeth and digestion. A radiograph may help with diagnosis. Lack of appetite can occur for a variety of reasons, but once it happens and normal digestion stops then this becomes a bigger issue of concern which must be addressed in addition to the initiating problems. If normal digestion and appetite is not regained within a few days then the condition can be fatal.

Treatment:

- 1) **Increase fluid and fiber in the diet.** In the veterinary clinic we usually give subcutaneous fluids and will send home powdered Critical Care supplement to mix up with water and syringe feed to the rabbit in multiple feedings per day. In addition at home please offer additionally leafy greens and free choice hay chopped and accessible. Generally one cannot overfeed the rabbit in this situation.
- 2) **Decrease pain.** Rabbits will have a stomachache or gas pains in addition to possible tooth pain further decreasing appetite. Injectable or oral pain medication may be prescribed by the veterinarian.
- 3) **Increase motility of digestion with medication and exercise.** Medication may be prescribed to promote motility of digestion, usually given several times a day. Exercise and decreasing the stress within the rabbit's environment may be recommended. Sometimes this means separating the sick rabbit from other animals.

Re-evaluation: Have a recheck with the veterinarian for additional treatment that may not be possible at home if the appetite is not improving within 24-36 hours. If dental disease is present this should be addressed with examination under anesthesia once stable. A repeat radiograph may be advised to assess digestion.

Surgery is often considered a last resort and unfortunately in most cases is unsuccessful. Your veterinarian can discuss the suitability of surgery and help evaluate quality of life concerns if improvement is not noted.

Prevention: Routine exam of teeth and condition by a veterinarian every 6 months. Monitor fecal output and appetite daily.

Signs of concern: Eating abnormal fiber like paper, hiding, grinding teeth, lethargy, drooling, lack of grooming, decreased appetite and feces.

Feeding Directions:

Feed a high fiber diet for adult non breeding rabbits.

- 1) Fresh timothy hay free choice daily, alfalfa hay is not advised unless rabbit is less than a year old.
- 2) Fresh greens: 1 cup per 4 pounds of rabbit weight daily. Give 3-4 different types of greens, stop if diarrhea or soft stool is noted. Examples: beet greens, collard greens, parsley, kale, romaine, bok choy, Brussel sprouts, watercress, spinach, escarole, radicchio, mustard greens, endive, carrot tops, dandelion greens, broccoli, peapods. * do not give lawn clippings *
- 3) Fruits: Maximum of 1-2 tablespoon per 5 pounds of body weight. Examples: apples, pears, peaches, berries, papaya, mango, kiwi, tomatoes, melon, oranges
- 4) Pellets: limit to those with a fiber content >20% if possible and not more than 1/8 cup of body weight per day. If less than 8 months old rabbit can have pellets free choice.
- 5) Foods to avoid: starch, cereals, bread, corn, pasta, sugar, sweets, candy, peas, crackers, beans, raisins, dried fruit, bananas, grapes, oats

Emergency care for rabbits:

Bulger Veterinary Hospital – available 24 hours, 7 days a week

247 Chickering Road

North Andover, MA 01845

978-725-5544

VCA Wakefield Animal Hospital – available M-F 7:30-8:30 pm, Sat/Sun 8am-6pm

19 Main Street, Wakefield, MA, 01880

781-245-0045

Angell Animal Medical Center – available 24 hours, 7 days a week

350 S. Huntington Ave.

Boston MA 02130

617-522-7282

Angell West – available 24 hours, 7 days a week

293 Second Avenue

Waltham, MA 02451

781-902-8400