

RABBITS- ILEUS AND GUT STASIS

NORMAL RABBIT DIGESTION

Rabbits are hind gut fermenters designed to digest lots of low quality high fibre food (grass). Healthy adult rabbits produce little dry pellet faeces which contain the indigestible components of the food. They also produce soft mucous covered faeces called ceacotrophs. Ceacotrophs are eaten straight away by the rabbit and this not only puts the correct bacteria back in the stomach but also gives the rabbit a second chance to digest vital nutrients from the food.

RABBIT DIET

In the wild, rabbits eat grass with a few leafy greens. It is important to replicate this in captivity. Your rabbit's diet should be 90% grass or meadow hay (dried grass) with some green leaves eg dandelions, carrot tops and lettuce leaves, as treats. Avoid alfalfa hay as it is too high in certain minerals but it can be fed to sick or very fussy rabbits to get them feeding on hay, in the short term.

Rabbit food i.e. pellet mix is fed as a supplement to hay and grass. We recommend you feed your rabbit compressed grass pellets where all the bits look the same. We recommend you feed your rabbit at the most 45g per kilo bodyweight per day (for an average 2kg rabbit about 8 tablespoons of pellets).

GUT STASIS

Ileus is the medical term for gut stasis. This is when the normal motility of the guts is interrupted and the contents stagnate and gas builds up. This causes a lot of pain for the rabbit and if left untreated can progress to such a serious state that the rabbit goes into shock and this can be fatal.

There are lots of different reasons why rabbits get gut stasis. Commonly it occurs after a stressful event for example moving house, change of food, illness. However it can also just happen out of the blue with no known stressful event. Some rabbits can eat inappropriate material which can cause a blockage and gut stasis, for example sawdust or carpet fibres.

SIGNS OF GUT STASIS

- Ⓞ Lethargy- i.e. not running around as much as normal
- Ⓞ Not eating as much as normal or being picky
- Ⓞ Small or no faeces
- Ⓞ Hunched stance
- Ⓞ Bloated abdomen

TREATMENT FOR GUT STASIS

SEEK IMMEDIATE ADVICE FROM A VET if you think your rabbit may have gut stasis. Treatment will likely involve hospitalisation for intravenous fluids, gut motility stimulants, pain relief and syringe feeding.

If caught early many rabbits can be treated with an injection of gut motility stimulant and a painkiller and syringe feeding at home, without hospitalisation.

Here are some medications that your vet might dispense for your rabbit and what they do.

Critical care- special food that can be mixed with water and syringe fed

Fibreplex- a paste containing fibre to stimulate gut motility and pro-biotics

Zantac- a motility stimulant

Metacam oral syrup- pain killer and anti-inflammatory

Baytril- oral antibiotic