

Preventative Care

Bunnies diet is the first place to start to ensure we are less likely to develop a significant gut stasis, this can also help in detecting one.

Oaten hay is the best way to ensure that ingested hair from grooming is well dispersed amongst hay and less likely to clump or irritate the gastrointestinal tract.

Feeding pellets and veggies in two meals, one in the morning and one in the afternoon will act as points of reference to detect when bunny is not interested in food and determine when bunny was last eating. It is highly recommended to adopt this feeding routine.

A bunny that gets ad lib pellets and veggies will not have the same excitement around pellet and veggie time as those who look forward to it and become very excited about it.



A bunny that normally gets very excited about its pellets who suddenly is not interested is a very reliable sign of gut stasis.

Environmental stressors can lead a bunny to develop gut stasis, rapid changes in weather and temperature, heats exceeding 30 degrees and exposure to animals that will scare bunny (roaming cats, swooping birds, snakes etc.) can all trigger an event of gut stasis. Living indoors will limit these stressors. Outdoor roaming under supervision is appropriate.

Some owners know to anticipate gut stasis, moving house, surgery at the vet, new addition to the home (new bunny, dog or cat etc.) and will keep a close eye to make sure any gut stasis is picked up.

It is not recommended to medicate your bunny (critical care is ok) without some veterinary advice. If in doubt, you can always call your vet and ask for advice.

Rabbit Gut Stasis

All you need to know



Little
PAWS Rescue
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What is Gut Stasis?

Gut stasis is a disease that occurs in many herbivores. In rabbits it is often the result of some form of stressor or pain such as; a significant environmental change, recovering from surgery, a heavy molt (where increased amounts of hair is ingested), or a sudden change in climate.

Any of these and potentially other causes lead bunny to stop eating. Many bunnies will do this regularly but will resume eating on their own without their human ever noticing them going off their food for that period.

For bunnies that remain off food a chain of events can unfold:

0-12 hours - Beginning with the bunny simply not eating and not drinking, some faeces may still be passed from the last meal but this will soon cease. The intestines no longer contract at all to propel material downstream and gas can start to accumulate.

13-24 hours - Bunny may start to show behavioural changes, getting grumpy or isolating themselves, mild dehydration sets in and the bunny may start to feel a little unwell/lethargic. The intestines and stomach may start to fill with gas and be visible with some bloating.

24-36 hours - Bunny may show signs of discomfort or pain, dehydration is a significant concern. The body strives to draw every last drop of residual fluid from the intestines, any material (fur and hay particles) will begin to clump and harden as the fluid is drawn out, this poses a serious risk of becoming lodged in the intestines. Bunny will likely be quite bloated with gas.

36+ hours - Bunny will likely be quite critically sick, likelihood of recovery is very slim. Chances of survival are guarded.

What to look for

For experienced bunny owners gut stasis is rarely of concern. The early indicating signs are quickly picked up and corrective measures are applied and bunny recovers without advanced interventions.

Owners will feed their bunny their pellets or veggies and note that bunny has shown no interest in the food. Some yummy food (banana, apple etc) will be offered to determine if bunny is being stubborn or truly not eating if bunny refuses the yummy food. Before leaving for the day the owner will empty the litter tray and collect any poos in the bunnies enclosure. A variety of foods will be left in the bunnies enclosure and the water bowl is noted for the amount of water in it.

If the owner has some critical care it will be provided by a syringe into the mouth (8-10ml of watery critical care).

Human comes home and will note if any food is eaten or not, if any new poos have been made. If the answer to both is no then a booking will be made to the vet either that day or the following morning.

At this point the estimated time of gut stasis will be from the last known meal which was the pellets and veggies the night before so by the time human is home from work the next day it will be less than 24 hours of gut stasis. This is the best time to seek the help of a veterinarian.

As mentioned, many times bunnies will resolve on their own and will have eaten by the time human comes home.

Bunnies that are not monitored in this way may easily be overlooked, sadly these include a lot of outdoor rabbits whose eating habits and faecal passage is not as easily monitored.

Gut Stasis vs Blockage

One of the most critical points of the veterinarians job is to determine the difference between gut stasis (intestines no longer contracting to propel food through them) and an intestinal blockage (obstruction somewhere in the stomach or intestines).

Some of the medications which are appropriate to use in a bunny with gut stasis can be disastrous if used in a blockage.

This includes Cisapride and Metoclopramide, drug that stimulate the gastrointestinal tract to commence propelling material through it.

If a blockage is present and the intestines are coerced back into work, material will be forced against the blockage and the intestines will stretch and can balloon out. This will reduce blood flow to the tissues of the obstructed region and may lead to breakdown, once perforated, sadly there is no recovery.

The best thing to do, if you have medications at home, is to visit the vet and have them determine if there is likely an obstruction or simply gut stasis. Once confirmed, those meds will be useful and when taking bunny to the vet bring those medications in and the vet can advise which to use and how much (this can change over time).

Although obstructions are far less common than gut stasis, they are still an important consideration when bunny goes off their food.

Feeding a little watery critical care in the first 24 hours when determining if bunny is still not eating is a safe option, the amount and frequency should be advised by the vet. But 8-10ml of watery critical care every six hours while bunny is not eating is an appropriate action to take.