

## HOW TO TELL IF YOUR BUNNY IS SICK

### AND NEEDS TO SEE A VET

Bunnies are prey animals and are very good at hiding illness; therefore bunny owners must watch their bunnies closely to identify if the bunny is unwell. This is why bunnies should be inside, so that they are part of the family and you become familiar with their normal temperament and behaviours. Your bunny can also go into shock from heat, noise or fright. If your bunny is unwell, you must take them to a bunny savvy vet immediately.

**CAUTION:** not all vets see enough bunnies to be experienced with bunny health diagnosis and medications, as they are different to cats and dogs. Bunnies need to be treated by a bunny savvy vet who can identify the different conditions in bunnies. Bunnies must continuously eat for gut mobility. The anatomy of a bunny is mostly gut and if the gut stops working then your bunny could die quickly.

#### WHAT TO LOOK FOR...

The most common symptoms that your bunny is unwell include:

- Not eating, or a disinterest in their favourite foods
- No droppings or loose droppings
- Sitting hunched for extended periods
- Walking dandruff (mites)
- Any swelling or lumps or wetness around the mouth or eyes
- Sudden weight loss

Some bunnies may also display other serious symptoms such as

- Bloating stomach
- Head tilt
- Unable to stand or lethargic or weakness in legs etc
- Other conditions such as sneezing, nasal discharge should also be investigated (NOTE: this does not mean that the bunny has snuffles, some bunnies can sneeze from hay, dust and other causes – also see a bunny savvy vet)
- There may be other symptoms not mentioned here



If your bunny shows any of these symptoms you need to **seek vet help immediately** from a bunny savvy vet, we recommend Dr Brendan Carmel at WARRANWOOD VETS or go to Dr Gerry Skinner at ANIMAL EMERGENCY CENTRE at Hallam. With any of these symptoms your bunny may be in pain, have teeth problems that make it painful to chew, have bloat, heatstroke, worms or other parasites or suffer from a number of other conditions that can potentially kill them within a few days if not treated. These conditions can cause the bunny to stop eating then their gut can stop working and they can die. If treated early the bunny can recover from most conditions or partly recover to still live a quality bunny life.

#### TREATMENTS

An annual visit to the vet is a necessity to have their calici vaccination and the teeth checked and claws trimmed to ensure your bunny is well. If a bunny stops eating this can be caused by a range of conditions – the vet will try to stabilise the bunny first with pain relief, fluids and critical care (a nutrient rich feed mixture), and possibly treat with gut mobility drugs or other medications depending on the diagnosis. Further tests may also be done if the bunny does not respond. Bunnies are fragile and will not recover by themselves from these conditions.

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO

For bunny owners it is frightening when the bunny gets sick, and this often happens at night and on weekends when the bunny savvy vets are closed and a trip to the Animal Emergency Centre is inevitable to save the bunny from dying. As emergency centres cost a bit more, we suggest that you set up a pet account to deposit money for unexpected vet visits so that this money is on hand for emergencies.

- Feed your bunny greens (and a small bunny treat of pellets) morning and night and monitor if they are eating enthusiastically
- Always introduce new foods gradually in very small amounts to prevent upset tummies
- Have a regular check-up with a bunny savvy vet. The checkup should include vaccinations, teeth check and a claw trim.
- Always bring your bunny inside into an air conditioned room if the temperature heats up or their area becomes warm. Do not have the bunny enclosure in direct sun during the day.
- Always house your bunny inside at night to protect them from predators and mosquitoes and supervise them if they are outside in the day.
- Only feed pellets as a treat (for example no more than a tablespoon morning and night). Pellets cause the bunnies to put on weight and therefore they cannot clean themselves properly or get out of the way of their urine. This can lead to painful conditions such as urine scald and fly strike.
- Make sure that your bunny has unlimited supply of fresh oaten or grass hay and fresh water. This keeps the teeth ground down and the gut moving normally.

Some Bunny Savvy Vets are listed on our websites [www.rabbitrunaway.org.au](http://www.rabbitrunaway.org.au). Please contact us at any time for support or referrals. (03) 9751 1229. **IMPORTANT** if you can no longer look after your bunny please bring them back to our orphanage where they will always have a home.