

THE AUTUMN YEARS: Senior Buns



Some rabbits can reach their autumn years from age six years onwards. Rabbits can live for 10 to 12 years indoors, however many do not make it to old age due to a range of health conditions and environments. A rare few rabbits have been known to live to the ripe old age of 16 years.

How old is old in a rabbit?

Longevity is complex and is reliant on health, wellbeing, hereditary and emotional energy surrounding a rabbit. A calm environment in the company of humans and other rabbit companions can contribute to longevity, whereas anxiety and lack of stimuli can contribute to early mortality rates.

What are the classic signs of aging in a rabbit?

- Believe it or not grey hairs around the ears and elsewhere and a thinning or coarser coat can be a determinant of an aging bun.
- Nails of our senior buns can also turn outwards and as the nails thicken callouses can form on the nail bed.
- Mobility and weakening in the back legs are classic signs of arthritis and aging joints.
- Some senior buns can suffer from hind leg paralysis caused by a range of aging conditions such as spinal subluxations, tumours, arthritis, parasites, stroke and callused heels.
- Glycoma and cataracts can also present in our senior buns.
- If your senior bun is sitting for extended times in the litter box or straining to urinate or urinating excessively this may indicate kidney failure, bladder or kidney stones or bladder sludge.
- Increased episodes of gut stasis or bloat is also more common in elder buns

Caring for a disabled or senior bun

Rabbits with aging, disability or mobility issues require a different housing setup, that does not have ramps or steps or requires the rabbit to jump into litter trays.

Disabled and elderly buns need a consistent, safe, warm and comfortable environment where they can observe activities and interact with the family, but also have quiet space. A blind bunny also relies on its companion for its mobility.

Rabbits are empathetic. A companion bunny will often nurse and care for the aging or frail companion providing love and support to their partner. Such as Tulip supporting Hiro who had mobility issues, and Mali supporting Tai who was frail and old.



What you can provide?

- Soft sheepskin pet bedding, “vet beds” are available to prevent urine scald and to provide a soft resting place for the disabled bun. They are easy to wash and replace.
- Buns suffering from mobility issues cannot always groom themselves, so help is needed to ensure your bunny back end is spot cleaned regularly.
- Walk in litter/hay tray so your bun can walk in to easily access their hay.
- Low water bowls and food dishes
- Soft blankets and pet pillows to support them
- Headtilt and rabbits with floppy bunny syndrome may need enclosure padding and cylinder cushions to support them during the acute stages of their conditions.



How your vet can help

Many of our special needs bunny live happy quality lives with adapting their environment and with the support of our bunny savvy vets.

- Our elderly buns need regular health checks
- Always go to a vet experienced in rabbit health
- Have regular check-ups and tests done to monitor health.
- Your vet may shave around the rear end if your bunny cannot groom sufficiently.
- Medication including pain, arthritis and inflammation relief can further support your bunny in their senior years

References

House Rabbit Journal Winter 2008: Volume V, Number 3

Australian Chapter House Rabbit Society, 2017. Rabbit Runaway Orphanage