

Gastrointestinal Stasis in Rabbits

-an emergency care guide-



A HOME FOR EVERYBUNNY

Iowa's Rabbit Rescue

Gastrointestinal Stasis, commonly referred to as simply "stasis", is a common illness in rabbits, and one of the biggest killers of our pets.

Stasis is often connected to gas build up in the intestine, so for the purpose of this guide, treating symptoms of gas is also treating possible stasis onset.

Signs and Symptoms

- Lack of or misshapen poop
- Hunched, Restless, or Lethargic
- Lack of Appetite

Observe Your Rabbit

If your rabbit refuses their food during a mealtime, or you think something might be off, take a moment to sit with them and offer a favorite food. If they perk up and munch on it, that is a great sign. If they sit hunched over, or are laying down but shifting positions often, this is typically a sign of belly pain. You may even see the rabbit pressing their stomach into the ground. These are all signs of a gas build up that can be connected to stasis.

Causes of Stasis

Diet

Dehydration and foods high in sugar can upset the stomach and send a rabbit into stasis. Be cautious when giving new foods. A diet high in fiber is key to stasis prevention.

Stress

A change to a rabbit's environment, the loss of a bond-mate, or another change to a rabbit's life can cause stress, which can cause them to stop eating, thus causing stasis.

Pain

Underlying health issues such as tooth spurs, infections, or intestinal blockages can cause stasis. Even simple pain from an injury can spark stasis. Check with your vet to make sure there isn't an underlying health issue.

First Steps – Evaluate

Take Your Rabbit's Temperature

Take a rabbit's temperature rectally by coating the flexible syringe with a light layer of vasoline, and carefully inserting just the very end of the thermometer. Do not force in or push hard as that can cause damage.

A low temperature could mean your rabbit is going into shock. A high temperature may mean they are fighting an infection. Either way, should your rabbit's temperature measure out of the normal range, contact your vet immediately.

If low, immediately place the rabbit on a warm heating pad. Normal is between 100.5-103.5

Listen to Your Rabbit's Gut

Using a stethoscope, or by simply placing your ear next to your rabbit's stomach, listen to their gut. A normal gut will hear minor gurgling and other signs of movement. A rabbit in complete stasis will have no gut sounds, and a rabbit with bad gas build up will hear popping sounds or very loud gurgling.

Treatment

Please understand that this should all be done under the care of a vet. The following treatments should only be done as initial home treatment, but do not replace the need for a vet if your rabbit doesn't show signs of improvement within a few hours.

Gas Drops

Simethicone infant gas drops can help to physically break down any gas bubbles formed by bacteria in the gut, making them less painful to pass. This can be found in your local drug store. Dose 1cc per hour for the first 3 hours, then 1cc every 3-8 hours as needed. Feed by mouth using a syringe.

Belly Rubs and Movements

Painful gas build up can prevent a rabbit from feeling well enough to eat, keeping them from recovering from a stasis episode. Encourage movement, even though it may seem cruel when they are in pain, as it will work their gas out.

If they will allow it, pick up your rabbit and gently massage their abdomen with your fingertips. Raise the rabbit's rear slightly to encourage gas movement. Most rabbits do not like this, but will settle in once you position correctly as it provides relief.

Recovery Food

Oxbow's Critical Care or Sherwood's SARx are vital items to have on hand during a stasis episode. These are high fiber foods designed to keep the digestive tract working. Follow instructions on the labels to mix with water and feed by syringe. If you do not have this on hand, mix some of your rabbit's pellets with warm water until they become soft and feed to your rabbit every few hours until you see signs of recovery.

Heat

In a bad case of stasis, a rabbit can go into shock. Use a heating pad or snuggle safe to provide additional heat for your rabbit. If you are able, check their temperature and call the vet if it is high or low. Regular is between 100.5 and 103.5

Signs of Recovery

- Eating
- Pooping
- Acting more energetic
- Drinking water

If your rabbit starts to eat again, this is a great sign!

However the most important sign of recovery is seeing poops that look fairly normal. It may sound silly, but you will want to count the poops and clean everything up every few hours so that you can track their progress. Positive signs will be poops returning to their normal size, shape, and quantity.

Be aware that full recovery may take a few days, but as long as you are seeing even slow progress, that is good.

When to Go to an Emergency Vet

If your rabbit has a fever or low temperature

You see no signs of improvement after 6-8 hours of care

Your rabbit is showing neurological symptoms such as wobbling or tilting their head

You feel uncomfortable or uncertain of your quality of home care