

Sludgy Bladder In Rabbits

Sludgy bladder syndrome occurs when the normal calcium crystals in rabbit urine are retained in the bladder. This can lead to a build up of a gritty sediment which can irritate the lining of the bladder and lead to inflammation. This 'sludge' can build up for a variety of reasons and is an indicator of an underlying problem.

Causes

Any problems which lead to reduced movement in your rabbit can lead to this condition:

Lack of exercise

Being confined to a small hutch for most of the day

Illness which makes them lethargic

Musculoskeletal problems such as arthritis

Obesity



What signs to look for in your rabbit:

- Painful or difficult urination
- Thick, pasty beige-brown coloured urine – could be mistaken for diarrhoea!
- Increased urinary frequency
- Urine staining of the back legs
- Blood in your rabbit's urine
- Painful abdomen – hunched posture
- Non-specific signs can also include: dullness and weight loss.



Normal rabbit urine ranges in color from clear to cloudy and yellow through to orange, red or brown depending on various factors including diet. This means that red urine may be normal not necessarily a sign of blood present so tests are required to rule this out.

Investigations

An initial investigation would include

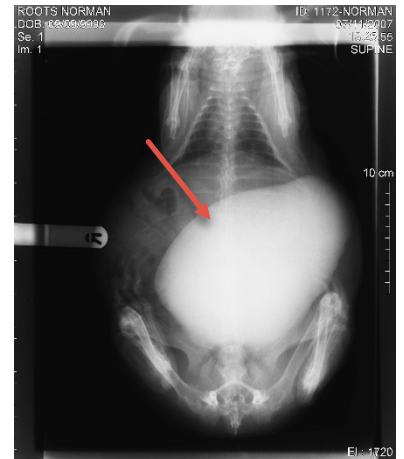
- Taking X-rays under sedation or anaesthesia
- Ultrasound of the urinary system
- Obtaining a urine sample to check for bacteria and inflammation.
- A blood sample to check that kidneys are working normally

Treatment would include

- Fluid therapy
- Pain relief
- Bladder flushing
- Antibiotics if secondary infection is present
- Correct diet if needed
- If urine scald is present, then clipping hair to help cleanse the skin and applying soothing topical creams may be undertaken.
- Treating the underlying cause, e.g. weight loss, increased opportunity to exercise etc.

Prevention

- Avoid overfeeding your rabbit so that it does not become obese
- Encourage/ allow your rabbit to move around and exercise
- Prevent dehydration/poor water intake – change and clean the water bottle, monitor intake, ensure bottles are the right height, provide a large heavy water bowl that cannot be knocked over and have multiple bottles / bowls.
- High calcium diets do not cause the problem but may make it worse so avoid alfalfa or lucerne hays which are high in calcium and make sure you feed a variety of lots of different vegetables rather than the same things on rotation all the time.
- If your rabbit has the opportunity to move but is staying in the same spot this may be an indication it is unwell and veterinary advice should be sought.



The bladder of this rabbit (red arrow) is greatly enlarged and filled with sludge.