

BATHING A RABBIT'S MESSY BOTTOM

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If your rabbit has a messy bottom due to runny stool or urine leakage, the most important thing to do is to determine the source of the problem, starting with a full exam by your rabbit-experience veterinarian. Be sure to ask for a full dental examination (including molars!) and blood chemistry and cell counts, if the vet deems it necessary.

A messy bottom is both uncomfortable and unsanitary, inviting worse problems such as skin scalding and even fly strike. While your vet does the detective work, it's up to you to keep the bunny comfortable. One way is with gentle "butt bath" to keep caustic bodily fluids away from the skin. There are two methods one can safely used to clean a messy bunny, and of the two, a DRY BATH is preferable. If the bunny is extremely soiled and very smelly, a wet bath may be necessary. Instructions for this procedure follow those of the Dry Bath.

DRY BATH PROCEDURE

1. Buy a container of Baby Cornstarch Powder (DO NOT use Baby Powder or any sort of powder that contains talc, a carcinogenic respiratory irritant). Unscented or scented powders are fine. DO NOT use commercial bath or flea powders or other pesticides on your bunny. Use only baby-safe cornstarch powder for best, safest results.
2. Place bunny in a comfortable position so that the soiled parts are easily accessible. Cradling him in your lap on his back works well, if he's calm. Use a clean towel for additional cushion.
3. Liberally apply the cornstarch to the soiled areas, and gently work the powder down into the fur, around messy poops, and down to the skin.
4. Gently work the powder around any stubborn clumps of debris. As the cornstarch coats the mess, it will slide away easily.
5. Once the largest chunks have been removed, use a soft-tipped brush or flea comb to gently loosen any remaining soil.
6. Pat the powdered areas well to remove loose powder. Avoid getting too much near the bun's nose!

Bunny should be clean and fragrant in just a few minutes! Rabbits generally enjoy a dry bath, and will sit quietly as the soothing powder takes away the sting of urine burn. If your bunny's bum is very messy, wet, and smelly, it may be necessary to give his back end a wet bath. Here's how to do it:

(See back page.)

WET BATH PROCEDURE

1. Purchase hypoallergenic, non-medicated pet shampoo from your veterinarian or pet supply store. Hy-Lyt is a good choice, but any similar product will work as well. **DO NOT USE ANY TYPE OF HUMAN SHAMPOO ON YOUR RABBIT.** Rabbit skin is far more delicate and sensitive than human skin. Even baby shampoo is too harsh, and can make the problem worse, not better.
2. Fill a bathroom sink to about 2.5" depth with lukewarm water.
3. Mix in about a tablespoon of shampoo, and stir well.
4. Being firm and gentle so that the bunny cannot jump and injure himself, lower his rear end into the lukewarm shampoo/water, and gently lather the solution onto the soiled areas (**DO NOT** wet the bunny's entire body!) until they are clean. If the bunny is very messy, you may have to change the water and do this several times.
5. Rinse with lukewarm, clear running water very thoroughly, leaving **NO** shampoo residue.
6. Towel dry carefully, being sure not to rub too hard against irritated skin.
7. Blow dry on low, keeping your hand close to the bunny's skin so that you can tell if the air flow is too hot. The last thing you want to do is burn already inflamed skin.
8. When bunny is fluffy-dry, carefully clip away the fur on areas where the skin is irritated. If you can't see the skin, or are doubtful where skin ends and fur begins, then do not clip! Rabbit skin is very thin and stretchy, and even a small wound can expand to alarming proportions!
9. Apply a thin layer of soothing balm, such as Calendula (from Health Food Store) or triple antibiotic ointment (avoid Neosporin Plus, which contains lidocaine, and is not recommended).
10. Repeat as necessary, but do not continue if rabbit seems unduly stressed by the experience. \

Whenever you handle a bunny, it's important to be firm, gentle, and ready to release the bunny at ground level if she starts to struggle violently. As you probably know, one good kick can dislocate or even fracture the spine. Always keep the bunny's safety first in mind if you attempt a bath!