

# RABBIT HEALTH CHECK-UPS

You should be able to give your rabbit a simple check-up, as outlined below, every 6 to 8 weeks. This does NOT take the place of a full physical exam given by your veterinarian once a year (more if the rabbit has a condition that requires monitoring). Regular check-ups are necessary for the health and longevity of your rabbit. Ask your veterinarian to show you ways to make your periodic check-ups easier on you and more comfortable for your rabbit.

## 1. Eyes

Rabbits can sometimes have a little bit of crust-like substance in the corners of their eyes; this is nothing to worry about and can be wiped clean with a cotton ball, tissue, or very clean fingers. If the eyes have a purulent (pus) discharge, the rabbit will need to be taken to a veterinarian immediately. Other than that, their eyes should be clear and bright with no signs of discharge from their tear ducts.

## 2. Ears

Check inside each ear for wax or dirt build-up. If ears do not appear clean, see your veterinarian.

## 3. Nose

Look for moisture or discharge around the nasal cavities or for a mucous/purulent substance inside. Even if you don't hear sneezing, if you see a slightly moist nose, check the insides of each front leg for dirty spots. Rabbits will wipe their nose with the insides of their front paws and can easily mask early signs of *Pasteurella* (snuffles) problems.

## 4. Teeth

Make sure that they are properly aligned and not maloccluded. The top teeth should be directly in line with the bottom teeth with a very slight over-bite. If the top teeth are extremely long and actually hang over the bottom, it is likely that your rabbit is maloccluded and will need the upper teeth clipped.

## 5. Chin

Check the underside of their chin for a waxy type of buildup from their scent gland. If you find this condition, you can try to wash it off with warm water, but it will often be mixed in with their hair and will need to be cut off with cuticle scissors. Rabbits that drink from bowls can sometimes get dermatitis, so also look for redness and irritation under the chin.

## 6. Feet

Check the soles of each rear foot for worn hair and for sores. This is usually the result of living on a wire floor, but can also be due to an overweight rabbit sitting on hard surfaces. It is very easy for *Pasteurella* or other infections to start in these sores, so see a veterinarian right away if they are found!

## 7. Nails

Check and trim nails as needed (see Nails in the Grooming handout). If you find a broken nail, make sure it has healed properly, since these are prone to infection. It is common for a rabbit to break a nail and it is usually nothing to worry about unless it becomes infected.

## 8. Fur and Skin

Fleas: Only use products prescribed or recommended by your veterinarian. Over-the-counter products can often be toxic to rabbits. Dandruff: Is it dandruff or is it fur mites? If you can only see flakes, it is almost impossible for you to tell without a microscope. A sure sign of mites is what will look like white scabs or a crust on the skin and will often start around the neck area. In addition, your rabbits can become very thin

with bald spots as the mites become worse. You can also see very thin hair and dandruff caused by scratching due to flea infestation.

#### **9. Genital Scent Glands**

In addition to the scent glands under their chins, rabbits also have much more powerful scent glands on both sides of their genitals. This area needs to be checked and will probably always need cleaning. Sometimes you'll just find a few moist flakes from dried skin, but more often you'll find a very dark brown, hard, waxy type of build-up. Either of these can be easily removed with a cotton swab dipped in water. The rabbit may have to be turned on its back to do this. Keep one hand pressed firmly on the stomach so that he/she cannot suddenly flip over and injure their back. Use your fingers to find the genitals and then separate the area directly adjacent to the genitals. When you find the scent glands and separate the overlapping skin, the dark substance will become visible. If your rabbit has a "musky" smell, it's time for a cleaning. If this substance is not cleaned and allowed to remain, the area could become infected.

#### **10. Lumps & Bumps**

This is also a good time to inspect your rabbit's body all over: legs, the stomach, head, bottom, between the legs, etc. Both male and female rabbits will have nipples on their stomachs, but other than that, if you feel any strange lumps or bumps, have your veterinarian check them out. Just as with humans, the earlier you find and treat a problem, the easier it is to cure.

All of the above are simple things to check, but it may be easier to do with two people. If check-ups are done every two months, you'll begin to know your rabbit well enough so that you can spot a problem in the early stages.