



RVC Exotics Service  
Beaumont Sainsbury Animal Hospital

We know how much rabbits are motivated by food and we all want to spoil our pets. There are ways you can continue to give treats without risking creating an obese bunny! Choosing treats wisely such as fresh and dried herbs and grasses are much better for your rabbit and they love them! Timing the feeding of treats carefully and encouraging foraging can also help to prevent obesity (see later).

One of the most important ways to prevent obesity is to be able to recognise it. The Pet Food Manufacturers Association has a fantastic chart to help you with this called a [rabbit size-o-meter](#). Please feel free to discuss this with one of the team during an appointment as prevention is always better than cure. We also run weight clinics if your bunny needs a little help.

## BRUSHING

During the moulting season – which seems to be all year round in some rabbits! – your rabbit will be shedding their old undercoat and grooming themselves and companions which leads to the ingestion of a lot of hair. This transits through the gut and can often be seen linking their poo pellets together. Large amounts of hair can lead to stasis or life threatening blockages. In fact, hair is THE most common cause of death due to gut blockages in rabbits. This is not a problem in wild rabbits but domesticated rabbits have been bred to have much longer coats. Breeds such as lion-heads, angoras and rex rabbits are all at higher risk of problems but many cross breed rabbits have much longer coats than their wild type cousins. Brushing your rabbits daily can significantly reduce this risk. For those who do not like being brushed choose a glove type brush or a Furminator which are very effective and combine their brushing with feeding time and they will accept it more readily. Fur ball pastes used in cats can also be given to rabbits to help with the passage of hair.

## FIBRE and DIET

The type of food you feed your rabbit can have a huge impact on gut movement EM RG(0( )E(0m)-0s)-(4)-(a)5)-(4r

## WATER

Providing your rabbit with water at all times is essential but particularly in the hotter weather. Rabbits consume much more water than dogs and cats on a per weight basis and can easily become dehydrated. It is essential to provide both bowls and a dripper bottle so they can choose. Bowls should be large heavy ceramic dog bowls filled right to the brim so they cannot tip them over.

## EXERCISE

A great way to prevent obesity and help with gut movement, exercise is also really important for your rabbits wellbeing. If your rabbit has a hutch and a run it is preferable to have them joined together to allow for exercise at all times. Some rabbits just like us- can need a little encouragement to move around. Look online for environmental enrichment ideas to encourage foraging behaviours. Not only will this help with gut function and obesity but it also reduced unwanted behaviours in many rabbits.

## PAIN

Any painful condition can lead to gut stasis but pain can be difficult to identify in rabbits. As a prey species, they have evolved to hide signs of pain or weakness as they are more likely to be singled out by predators. Older rabbits can develop arthritis like dogs and cats but it is underdiagnosed in this species because they hide it. It may be necessary to do a pain relief trial in some rabbits and look for signs of improvement to help assess for pain.

## STRESS

Any stressful condition such as the presence of predators, building works, fireworks etc can lead to gut stasis. Reducing these stressors as much as possible is helpful. If the stress is unavoidable, then increasing the consumption of hay and grass for several days prior to a stressful event such as a routine vaccination can reduce the risk of stasis. One of the best ways to increase hay and grass intake is to cut back on vegetables, treats and pelleted foods.

Gut stasis is unfortunately not a completely preventable condition because there are so many factors that contribute to its development. Despite this, following the above guidelines can significantly reduce the risk of this condition for many rabbits.

