

# Bunny Palooza

## GI Stasis in Rabbits

### What is GI Stasis

Gastrointestinal Stasis is a condition where the digestive system slows down. If not treated immediately, it could result in serious complications or even death. If rabbits stop eating and pooping, their vital organs will begin to shut down which can lead to death if left untreated.

### Causes & Prevention of GI Stasis

**Poor diet:** Two of the main causes of GI Stasis are insufficient fibre intake, and too many carbohydrates/sugars. This can lead to an imbalance in gut health in rabbits. Hay is one of the most important foods that keeps a rabbit's gut healthy. Avoid overly sugary treats, and veggies that can cause excess gas (see our rabbit diet info sheet for the dos and don'ts!).

**Grooming:** Rabbits are constantly grooming themselves and their partners, much like cats do. Hair can often get stuck in their intestinal tract and cause a blockage. Unlike cats, rabbits cannot vomit or cough up a hair ball. It is very important to be diligent with brushing your rabbit to remove dead hair. Having a healthy diet of hay can also help as it allows the hair to pass through via their droppings.

**Lack of fluids:** Insufficient water intake can contribute to GI Stasis. Water must be available to rabbits 24/7 and is best given in a bowl. Wall mounted bottles don't allow for proper drinking and can deter them from drinking as often and as much as they should be.

**Stress and pain:** When rabbits feel unwell, they may start to avoid eating and drinking, thus leading to gastrointestinal issues.

**Exercise:** Plays a very important role in rabbit health. This is a major reason why we advocate for rabbits to be free roam or in a large pen to allow them to do "zoomies" and "binkies". A rabbit's intestinal health benefits greatly from physical activity. Be wary of any injuries that could lead to pain however!

**Dental issues:** Often lead to gastrointestinal issues. Rabbit teeth are constantly growing! Eating hay and chewing on rabbit safe sticks are essential activities for maintaining good dental health. Routine check ups with your vet are also important because many rabbits need dental care that only a vet can identify and provide. Rabbits that cannot eat properly, or that have dental pain, will be unable to eat enough for normal gut function.

**Blockages:** Eating things they shouldn't can lead to blockages. It is important to bunny proof a rabbit area for play, and to monitor any chewing of unsafe items such as blankets, rubber mats, etc.

### Signs & Symptoms to Look For

- Lethargic, sitting in a hunched position, and stomach pressed to the ground
- Not wanting to eat, especially their favourite treats
- Reduced or no poop droppings
- Grinding of teeth in pain
- Loud gurgling sounds or no gurgling sounds from the stomach area
- Bloated abdomen due to gas buildup
- Firm stomach due to buildup or blockage (can feel hard and dough-like)

Once you know your rabbits' habits and routines, identifying out of the ordinary ("not being themselves") behaviour becomes easier.

### Treatment of GI Stasis

Treating potential GI Stasis cases is critical and treatment depends on the underlying cause. For example, if pain is the trigger, identifying and treating the source will often rectify the GI issues.

Once the symptoms are noticed, the best course of action is to seek veterinary help right away; any delay in treatment can lead to further complications. Attempting to diagnose by yourself is not recommended as there are too many causes and factors to consider.

At home, you can start by identifying when the issues began, how it manifested, and any other details regarding food and activities during the previous 24-48 hours. This information is helpful to your rabbit's health care provider. While waiting for your vet visit, you should try to keep your rabbit warm. You should not attempt to medicate or force feed (e.g. critical care via syringe) unless you have been instructed to do so by your vet.

With prompt veterinary care, many rabbits recover well, especially when GI Stasis is caught early.

### Summary of Important Points:

- Know your rabbit's normal habits
- Keep rabbit-savvy vet contact info readily available, including your regular vet and emergency vets in your area
- Don't wait - seek help early!

