

# Post-operative care of Rabbits

*by Dana Krempels, Ph.D.*

Any surgery can be stressful to your companion rabbit, and there's really no such thing as a surgery that is 100% risk free. However, the following information should help you and your rabbit get through either emergency or elective surgery with a minimum of stress, and a maximum of safety.

## Post surgical Care

1. A neuter and (especially) a spay will make your bunny **sore for a day or two**. Many experienced vets routinely administer analgesics (e.g., Banamine (flunixin meglumine) after the surgery, just to keep the bunnies comfortable and to encourage them to eat as soon as possible.
2. Under normal circumstances, rabbits do not require post-surgical antibiotics.
3. Keep your rabbit quiet for a few days after surgery, but do try to maintain normal feeding and bonding times. There is no reason to separate bonded pairs or groups as long as the bunnies interact calmly. Adhesions usually will begin forming within 24 hours. If your male bunny seems very sore after his neuter, a sitzbath in a weak solution of betadine and lukewarm water (about 1 tablespoon of betadine in four cups of water) can be very soothing. Be sure to gently check the sutures for a day or two after surgery to be sure the bunny isn't chewing them, and to check for unusual redness, swelling or signs of infection. If you see any sign of problems, the bunny should be taken back to the vet immediately.
4. Watch to be sure that your bunny does not chew out the sutures! Many vets use subcuticular (under the skin) sutures that cannot be chewed out, and may even put a line of surgical glue over the incision for extra strength. You might ask your vet about this before your bunny has his surgery. In most cases, an E-collar is not necessary for a rabbit, and may cause more stress than it is worth, except in extreme suture-chewing cases. If your bunny does end up wearing an E-collar for a day or two, note that you will probably have to feed him his cecotropes, since he will not be able to reach them for normal ingestion. (More information on the nature of cecotropes can be found in "The Mystery of Poop".)
5. Healing is usually well under way by seven days after neutering for a male, and ten days after spaying for a female. **NOTE THAT MALES MAY HAVE VIABLE SPERM FOR UP TO FOUR WEEKS POST-NEUTERING!** Do not place your male with an intact female until a minimum of four weeks after his neuter surgery!
6. If your rabbit has a bonded mate, you may need to separate them physically for a day or two to

avoid injury if they continue to mount one another, or play too roughly. Usually this is not necessary. But if it is, be sure to allow them to see, touch and smell each other at all times, even if they cannot physically contact one another. The rabbit who has undergone surgery will need the emotional support of his/her mate for an uneventful recovery. Allowing them to be in contact also reduces the chances that they will fight after re-introduction.

7. Offer your rabbit a bowl of water, even if a water bottle is usually used. A rabbit needs to drink after surgery, but often won't do so if he has to "work" for his water. He will recover more quickly if he's well hydrated.

8. If your bunny is reluctant to eat after surgery, offer a favorite treat. He will recover more quickly if the GI tract gets back up and running as soon as possible after a surgery. Fragrant herbs, such as basil, parsley, dill and mint seem to appeal to a bunny recovering from surgery.

9. It is not unusual to see a few soft or mucus-covered stools after surgery. Stools should return to normal within a day or two, if your bunny has returned to regular eating habits. If you continue to see mucus in the stool beyond a day or two, or if fecal production stops, consult your veterinarian immediately.

10. **If your rabbit hasn't eaten ANYTHING within 24 hours of surgery, we advise calling your veterinarian**. Monitor the output of fecal pellets closely. If fecal output slows or stops after surgery, your bunny may be suffering from GI stasis (ileus) due to the stress of the surgery.

11. If your bunny suffers unusual complications, you may need to "force feed" her for a few days after surgery to help get the GI tract back to normal. A very good product for this purpose is Critical Care, manufactured by Oxbow Hay Company, and often available through your veterinarian.

For more information, or for referral to a rabbit-experienced veterinarian in your area, please visit the House Rabbit Society . Don't wait for an emergency to find a good rabbit-experienced vet who will be available at odd hours. For a referral to rabbit-savvy veterinarians in southern Florida, call the House Rabbit Society of Miami at (305) 666-BUNN, or visit our On-line Veterinarian Referral List.

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