



## FACIAL NERVE PARALYSIS

The facial nerve controls the muscles of facial expression - muscles of the eyelids, lips, ears and noses as well as some parts of the glands within the neck region, the tongue and ear. The facial nerve starts at the brain in an area called the brain stem. It then travels through the ear and exits the skull to travel around the jaw to supply the face. Rabbits are prone to developing facial nerve damage (or paralysis) secondary to a number of conditions including:

- Otitis media (middle ear infection or inflammation) – this is the most common cause
- Trauma (bite wounds or trauma to the head)
- *E. cuniculi* - a parasite infection of the nervous system
- Idiopathic (ie unknown causes)

There are a number of ways to investigate what might be the cause of facial nerve damage including:

- Otoscopic or endoscopic ear examination
- Neurological examination. A few simple feeling tests can show us what areas still have sensation.
- Skull radiographs (x-rays). This allows for examination for changes to the middle ear. Subtle changes will not show on radiographs.
- Skull CT. A CT scan is more sensitive than radiographs and gives more information on the extent of the infection, it is nearly 100% reliable. If middle ear infection is confirmed, surgery is recommended.
- A blood test that screens for *E. cuniculi* infection

If your rabbit has facial nerve damage there are some treatment options however they are not always successful:

- For traumatic facial nerve paralysis: anti-inflammatory pain relief and acupuncture often has a good result.
- For suspected middle ear infection we may commence trial treatment with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories for several weeks. For deep infections, surgery is recommended. There is generally a poor prognosis for the return of function to the facial nerve, however it is important to treat for middle ear infection so that progression of other nerve damage does not occur.

Many animals can live happily with facial nerve paralysis however they do need regular check-ups to ensure they are managing to chew and function okay. If you have any concerns or would like any further information please don't hesitate to contact us.

