



How to Nurse your Rabbit at Home

STAY CALM and DON'T PANIC

Rabbits are prey animals that can pick up on stress quite easily. Staying as calm as you can does often help to keep their stress levels low.

Medicating

Make sure to give any medications that you have been prescribed for your rabbit as per the instructions told to you by your vet.

Never self-medicate your rabbit without first speaking to a vet. Each medication is different and acts on the body in different ways. Some medications should not be given in certain situations and can make things worse.

Feeding

Always provide your rabbit with all their normal food during times of illness. It is best to make any recommended changes to the diet after they have recovered from their illness. Sometimes while they are unwell they can prefer their fresh food to be grated or shredded which makes it easier to eat. Make sure to discard uneaten vegetables/fruit once spoiled or every 3 – 6 hours. Also always make sure fresh water is available at all times. Sometimes it's a good idea to provide water in both a sipper bottle and a bowl.

Critical Care Feeding

- Critical Care® is a product produced by Oxbow that acts as a recovery food for rabbits and guinea pigs. It is high in fibre as it is made with Timothy Hay and is a balanced food item. It comes in a few different flavours with the main two being Apple Banana and Aniseed. Each rabbit is different in what they prefer but in general the Apple Banana flavour is more popular.
- We recommended that every rabbit owner has a bag of Critical Care at home and we sell it at all of our clinics. To make up the Critical Care mixture you mix a small amount of water until a thick soup like consistency is formed. This is then syringed into your rabbit. Once made up it can generally be stored as a mixture for up to 24 hours in the fridge.
- Any syringe can be used for feeding but we find that 1ml syringes are best. If you are struggling to suck the medication up through the small syringe then you can cut the tip off the syringe which often makes it easier to give.
- The dose rate used for most situations is 60ml of made up mixture per kg per 24 hours. The total amount should be divided by the number of feeds that are required so you





know how much to give per feed. As a general rule most rabbits that are unwell would receive critical care every 2-4 hours.

- If your rabbit doesn't like the critical care mix you can try a different flavour or add a small amount of a safe vegetable or fruit flavoured baby food to the mixture. Vetafarm also produce a similar product called Herbivore Critta Care that is also very good.



Alternatives to Critical Care – only to be used in an emergency

If you are unable to access critical care then in some situations ground up rabbit pellets can be used. These can be soaked in warm water and then mashed up, or put into a coffee/spice grinder to make a powder, to mix with water to make a slurry. You can also mix this with some juiced or pulverized vegetables (which can be first boiled to soften if needed).

Housing

For rabbits that are sitting up normally and able to move around

In most cases it is best to keep your rabbit in its normal house to reduce stress. Make sure the hutch/cage/enclosure is cleaned regularly – at least once to twice daily. Make sure all food and water bowls are easily accessible. If you are able to then it is a good idea to move your rabbit's house into a quiet spot away from noises, other pets and people – ideally indoors in a constant comfortable temperature if possible.

For rabbits that are recumbent and unable to move much

You can often make up a temporary hospital cage using a simple washing basket. To do this then please line the basket with a clean towel. Rolled towels can be used as support for the body if needed. Heat packs can be used as support also but please always make sure they are not too hot. Fresh food, hay, pellets can be spread around in front of the rabbit's face for easy access. Regular towel changes are necessary once they become soiled with urine/faeces. Make sure to check every 2 hours if bedding changes are required. The rabbit's body position needs to be changed/moved every 2 – 4 hours. This is to prevent muscle cramping and bed sores

Other Important Points

It is important to monitor your rabbit's faecal and urine output so that you can keep your vet updated on their progress. If you have a thermometer at home it is great to be able to monitor their temperature to ensure they are staying warm. It is also important to check your rabbit's hydration regularly. To do this you can gently pull up some skin (to make a tent shape) at the scruff of the neck on your rabbit and then release – if the skin bounces back to normal straight away then it is likely that your rabbit is not clinically dehydrated. If the skin is slow to return to normal or stays in the tented shape, then





your rabbit is generally dehydrated. Exercise and movement help to promote gut motility. If the rabbit is able, please allow as much free exercise and run around time as possible.

Rabbit First Aid Kit

The following list is good general guide of what to have on hand at home:

- Left-over medication – Always check with your vet before self-medicating your rabbit.
- Critical Care
- Syringes in assorted sizes– ie. 1 ml, 3 ml, 10 ml, 30ml
- Towels and blankets
- Box, carry cage or laundry basket
- Heat packs
- Your rabbit's favourite treats



If your rabbit is not improving as expected then it is best to get them rechecked at your vet. Some of the signs that indicate that they may need to be re-examined include not defecating, becoming dehydrated, getting more lethargic or looking bloated. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.

