



OBESITY IN RABBITS

Obesity is a common problem seen in pet rabbits. Much of this has to do with their lifestyle, diet and level of activity. Rabbits are animals that convert food efficiently meaning that they can put on weight quickly and easily if fed incorrectly. The largest dietary culprits that cause weight gain are the muesli type mixes, excessive pellets and overfeeding of treats such as apples, bananas, carrots, and bread, cake and other human foods which should not be fed to any rabbit or guinea pig. The other main factor involves space restriction (eg a small hutch) and a “couch- potato” lifestyle.

It has been shown that obesity is a serious health concern- it can result in lack of grooming hard to reach places, an inability to reach and eat caecotrophs as well as an increased risk of ear infections as they often cannot scratch and clean their ears effectively. Obesity can also lead to urine and faecal staining/scalding, cystitis, fly strike, hypertension (high blood pressure) and cardiac problems. Obesity also compounds arthritic problems as there is more strain placed on their joints. An obese rabbit is at a higher risk of complications or adverse reactions to some medications and general anaesthesia.

We recommend a **WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAM** addressing both dietary adjustments and increasing exercise levels. It is important to remember that weight loss is a gradual process and in most cases we recommend weight loss at a rate of 1% of body weight per week

DIETARY ADJUSTMENTS

1. The first thing to cut out of the diet is the treats. At the bare minimum, treats should be limited to a small slice of apple or ½ a small carrot per rabbit per day. Sultanas and cranberries are also okay in small doses but must be limited.
2. Slowly wean rabbits off muesli mix/pellets and transition to diet consisting of 70-90% hay and 10-30% fresh green leafy vegetables over a 2-4 week period. Some rabbits are sensitive to changes in diet, so always make sure that your rabbit is actually eating the new diet and passing normal formed poos before restricting the old diet. Pellets should be fed at no more than ¼ of a cup per day for an average 2kg sized rabbit.
3. Inform and involve the whole family with rabbits new diet change as this can help to minimize the feeding of additional treats.

INCREASE EXERCISE LEVELS

1. Encourage rabbits to exercise more through PLAY. Rabbits often love to play with toys (pushing them, rearranging them, throwing them around, they can even play fetch if trained) and with you. Experiment with different types of toys as different rabbits have distinct personalities and play preferences. Rotate the toys so that your rabbit will not get bored of them.





2. Use environment enrichment eg tunnels, cardboard boxes, towels to push, different levels/stages on which to jump on.

3. Provide MORE SPACE and time for your rabbit to exercise in. Rabbits normally love to explore, dig, jump and do binkies. Remember we recommend 4 hours of free exercise time per day for each rabbit.

4. Encourage your rabbit to work for his/her food. Teach him/her to come to you for food. Make rabbits forage for their veggies. A good way to do this is to hide the veggies in your rabbit's environment. Present small amounts of pellets/treats (eg dried cranberries, Oxbow Timothy Treats) in treatballs or scattered in their hay.

5. If your rabbit does not have a rabbit friend, get a bonded companion for him/her. It is important to let your rabbit chose their rabbit friend as some rabbits will get on with each other while others will not. Adopting a rabbit friend from a shelter is a great idea and most shelters will be happy to arrange a meet and greet session for your rabbit. Make sure that both rabbits are de-sexed as this will often help improve the chances that they will get along well. Rabbits are definitely happier and less stressed when they have a bonded rabbit companion, and they will both get some exercise through play with each other.

RECORD BODY WEIGHT

Weigh your rabbit on a regular basis eg every week on the same set of scales. Record their body weight in a diary and make sure that you are noticing a downward trend with you rabbits weight. You are welcome to bring your rabbit into the clinic for a complimentary weigh-in using our scales. A revisit in 3-6 months with your vet is recommended.

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

