



Urinary stones in rabbits and guinea pigs!

Rabbits and guinea pigs commonly suffer from problems with urinary stone formation.

As vets we call this problem urolithiasis and it relates to the formation of urinary calculi in the kidneys, ureters, bladder, or urethra. Calculi are composed of minerals that join together to form solid objections; these can be in the form of large 'stones' or smaller 'sand' and actually do resemble rocks and beach sand. The smallest calculi are just visible with the naked eye where are the largest calculi can be the size of a tennis ball in a large rabbit.

This article looks at the common causes of urolithiasis, how we diagnose it, what treatment options are available as well as what to look out for in your rabbit and guinea pig.

What are some of the causes of urolithiasis?

High calcium diets in adult rabbits or guinea pigs

Calcium is important within the body for healthy bone and teeth formation as well as a number of other important physiological functions however if too much calcium is consumed then urinary stones can form. Lucerne hay is quite high in calcium and should only be given sparingly to adult animals, if at all. Mineral supplements should generally be avoided as they can increase the risk of urolithiasis.



Not enough water intake

Hay is very important for your rabbit and guinea pig for a number of reasons including dental wear and gastrointestinal function however one of the other reasons to feed hay is to help encourage your rabbit or guinea pig to drink adequate amounts. Hay is quite a dry food item so your pet will often drink more when they are eating lots of hay.

Infection

Urinary infections can lead to bladder stone formation in some cases.

What symptoms do they normally show?

The most common symptoms we see are pain or vocalisation when urinating, blood in the urine, straining, lethargy and urinating small amounts frequently.

How do you diagnose the problem?

Luckily for us vets, urinary stones often show up well on radiographs (x-rays). We take a few different views to allow us to evaluate the whole urinary tract and see where the stone or stones have formed. In some rare cases the urinary stones are not visible on radiographs and in these cases an ultrasound usually shows them up well.





What treatment options are available?

The treatment options depend on where the urinary calculi have formed as well as the size of the stone or stones. Unfortunately in many cases medical therapies to disintegrate the calculi are often not effective on their own. If the stone or stones are too large to pass then surgery is often needed. If there is lots of small bladder 'sand' or 'sludge' present then your pet's bladder may need to be catheterised and gently flushed out.

Is it a serious problem?

Urolithiasis can be very serious as the calculi can damage the insides of the urinary tract as well as become stuck and cause a urinary blockage. If a blockage does occur then this can quickly develop into a life-threatening problem.

Does it recur?

Unfortunately, in some cases urinary calculi can reform however once the stones have been removed there are a number of medical and dietary treatments available to minimise the chance of recurrence.

