



GASTRIC DILATION (BLOAT)

Gastric dilation (commonly known as bloat) in rabbits is commonly caused by gastrointestinal obstruction. Rabbits cannot vomit and when in pain continuously secrete saliva. This fluid accumulates in the stomach leading to the rapid development of gastric dilation at the level of the stomach and small intestines. Gas is produced which leads to further distension. Pain from the distension stimulates hormone release which causes secondary gut stasis.

Gastric dilation can put pressure on the chest and compromise breathing and circulation of blood. In addition changes to blood volume and electrolytes occur.

Common causes of intestinal obstruction:

- Pellets of compressed hair (trichobezoar). These pellets are similar in appearance to normal faecal pellets but larger in size.
- Intestinal cancer
- Carpet fibre
- Post surgery adhesion
- Intestinal intussusceptions

Common sites of intestinal obstruction:

- Proximal small intestine
- Junction between the small intestine and the large intestine



DIAGNOSIS of gastric dilation is on abdominal palpation and radiographs.

PROGNOSIS can be variable depending on the clinical state of the rabbit and the duration of the gastric dilation. A blood test is recommended to evaluate the risk of the general anaesthesia.

TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Medical management involves active warming, pain relief, fluid therapy, gastric decompression and repeat x-rays.





If the rabbit is bright and radiographically the obstruction looks to be moving then the rabbit can be monitored and treated medically. There is often a rapid clinical improvement if the obstruction passes into the hindgut and the rabbit may even begin eating.

Surgery:

Exploratory laparotomy (a type of surgery) is often the best option and is generally well tolerated in rabbits. It is often diagnostic and offers an opportunity to resolve a gastrointestinal obstruction. Prompt surgery is generally the best option in many cases.

Gastric dilation is a serious condition however with aggressive intervention many rabbits make a full recovery.

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

