



## EXTERNAL EAR INFECTIONS

Lop eared rabbits are very susceptible to developing external ear infections (otitis externa) as any changes that result in increased humidity and or temperature within the ear canal will encourage overgrowth of bacteria or yeast (commonly already present within the ear canal), which results in inflammation.

*Causes of otitis externa may include:*

1. Parasites - Ear mites (*Psoroptes cuniculi*)
2. Foreign bodies e.g. grass seeds
3. Allergies
4. Irritants
5. Breed factors e.g. lop ears (floppy ears, narrow ears)
6. Narrowing of the ear canal
7. High environmental humidity
8. Underlying otitis media (middle ear infection)



Behavior changes that indicate an external ear infection include itchiness around their ears, head shaking, irritability, and loss of hearing. In some cases, your rabbit might not show any changes in the initial phase of their infection.



Treatment of external ear infections generally involves the use of an ear cleaner, antibiotic ear drops and often an anti-inflammatory/pain relief oral medication. Sometimes oral or injectable antibiotics are also required.

Excessive wax build up in their ears traps debris and forms a barrier against most ear drops. In these cases, it may be difficult to successfully clear wax and debris in the external ear canal and we often need to flush the ears under general anaesthesia using a specialized endoscope.

If the infection has cleared up, we generally recommend once to twice weekly ongoing ear cleaning at home with an ear cleaner to continue to remove the wax that accumulates.

If external ear infections continue to occur, an abscess forms at the ear base or your rabbit is badly affected then it is likely that they may have an underlying middle ear infection (otitis externa). If this is the case often radiographs (x-rays) or ideally a CT scan will help to pick this up. The management of otitis media often involves surgery as it is very hard to treat with medical therapy alone.

