



FLOPPY BUNNY SYNDROME

What is Floppy Bunny Syndrome?

It is described as the sudden occurrence of a group of varied symptoms in an apparently healthy rabbit. Onset of symptoms has been described from 1-12 hours. There appears to be no breed or age predilection for rabbits described with this syndrome with the following signs generally seen:

- No or little movement in back legs/front legs or both
- Generalised weakness or paralysis
- Not drinking/eating (or a decreased appetite)

What causes Floppy Bunny Syndrome?

The correct answer is no one knows for sure what the exact cause is. The symptoms listed above can occur in many conditions. Blood tests and further investigation can sometimes result in a definite diagnosis of one of the conditions covered below.

Is this condition fatal?

Unless the underlying cause of these symptoms is found, this is a question that cannot be answered. Many conditions that cause similar signs can indeed cause death if left untreated. At a bare minimum if supportive treatment is not initiated then a decrease in food and water consumption can result in dehydration, collapse and death.

What conditions can cause floppy bunny syndrome to occur?

- Hypocalcemia (low calcium). A condition seen in lactating rabbits.
- Hypoglycemia. A common condition in young rabbits recently rehomed with a change in diet and possible secondary coccidia infections. A simple blood glucose test can help to confirm this. Treatment is often successful if aggressive and instigated quickly.
- Hypokalemia. A rare condition sometimes associated with rabbits diagnosed with Floppy Bunny Syndrome caused by low potassium in the blood. This may be due to malabsorption or low dietary level
- Hypothermia. A decrease in body temperature, often a secondary complication to many conditions, from gut stasis to spinal trauma.
- Hypotension. A low blood pressure is common in collapsed rabbits for many reasons, from gut stasis to heart disease.
- Dehydration. Rabbits can dehydrate very quickly and can hide the initial signs of this critical condition until they collapse and





show signs often attributed to Floppy Bunny Syndrome. A simple blood test to measure red blood cell count and total protein in the blood can help diagnose this common condition

- Infectious causes - *Encephalitozoon cuniculi*, a protozoan (parasite) which can cause a myriad of symptoms.
- Spinal cord damage. Rabbits are often keen climbers and even though a fall may have not been observed it should always be suspected. X-rays of the spine and hips should always be considered.
- Musculoskeletal pain. Conditions such as arthritis, muscular pain or other spinal conditions may present with similar signs
- Selenium deficiency (nutritional muscular dystrophy) either due to a diet lacking in selenium or the Vitamin E necessary to process selenium
- Ingestion of toxins. This may be seen in garden plants, even if the rabbit has lived in a garden for years, or hay or feed contaminants

In some cases the cause of the Floppy Bunny Syndrome cannot be identified.

What can I do if I suspect Floppy Bunny Syndrome in my rabbit?

The first thing to consider is undertaking a few simple blood tests to try to find the underlying cause. If these tests are not conclusive then there are two main paths to consider

- a) Further investigation. This is ideal both for your rabbit and allowing us to understand the possibility of an underlying cause in rabbits that show unexplained signs commonly attributed to Floppy Bunny Syndrome. Further investigation may include further more extensive blood tests and further imaging with x-rays or CT scans.
- b) Supportive care. Many owners choose to invest in time with a high commitment to nursing care. It should be noted that if further investigation has not ruled out more common conditions recovery may not be possible. Nursing care can consist of hydration (fluids either via a IV drip, orally or by injection), feeding (syringe feeding with critical care every 2-6 hours – 60ml of the made- up solution per kg of body weight per 24hours), hygiene (changing of bedding every 2 hours), movement (changing of position and massage every 2-3 hours), pain relief and gut motility medications.

Floppy Bunny Syndrome is a horrible condition however with the right tests and treatment many rabbits can survive and make a full recovery. If you are at all concerned please get in touch with us.

