



Floppy bunny syndrome is one of the more dramatic and alarming conditions that a rabbit owner can experience. Fortunately, the prognosis for most cases is good with proper supportive care.

What Is Floppy Bunny Syndrome?

This syndrome is a neurological condition that usually presents with acute onset weakness to flaccid (floppy) paralysis of the skeletal muscles of the hind/front legs or both.

Seriously affected rabbits may not be able to do anything but lie on their sides, and less severely affected animals may be able to sit up and eat, but not be able to hop around very much.

What Are the Symptoms of Floppy Bunny Syndrome?

The occurrence of a group of varied symptoms can present and there appears to be no breed or age tendency for rabbits described with the following signs:

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

What Causes Floppy Bunny Syndrome?

Despite a lot of research being performed right across the world, the specific pathophysiology and **cause of floppy bunny syndrome still remains unknown**. Possible causes and potential risk factors are listed below:

Genetic or Temperature/Humidity Based Factors

We believe that there may be a genetic or temperature/humidity-based risk factor as we see many more cases of this condition in warmer areas such as Perth than we do in Melbourne. We also seem to see more cases during or after humid days. We aren't sure as to how much of a role this may play as the changes seen could simply be due to a different genetic population or other factors that differ between the cities.





Hypocalcaemia (Low Calcium)

A condition sometimes seen in lactating rabbits.

Hypoglycaemia

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.

Hypokalaemia

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 of potassium.

Hypothermia

A decrease in body temperature, often a secondary complication to many conditions, from gut stasis to spinal trauma.

Hypotension

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

Many rabbits that have been affected by floppy bunny syndrome also test positive for [Encephalitozoon cuniculi](#), a parasite that is common in rabbits, and can cause other neurological problems.

Spinal Cord Damage

Rabbits are often keen climbers and even though a fall may have not been observed it should always be suspected. It is very important not to misdiagnose floppy rabbit syndrome as a spinal fracture, as the prognoses for both conditions are vastly different. Careful palpation and x-rays or a CT scan can help differentiate these conditions, as well as a good history.





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.

While the above provides a number of potential causes or risk factors it is worth noting that unfortunately in many cases an exact cause cannot be identified.

What Can I Do If I Suspect Floppy Bunny Syndrome In My Rabbit?

The majority of rabbits affected by floppy rabbit syndrome will recover within 2 to 7 days, and it appears that the severity of the condition does affect the length of recovery time.

The first thing to consider is to [book an appointment](#) with your local veterinary team so they can perform a few simple tests to try to find the underlying cause. If these tests are not conclusive then there are two main paths to consider:

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 more extensive blood tests and further imaging such as x-rays or CT scans.





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 24 hours), hygiene (changing of bedding every 2 hours), movement (changing of position and massage every 2-3 hours), pain relief and gut motility medications.

How Is Floppy Bunny Syndrome Treated?

Treatment is supportive, and this may include anti-inflammatory medications, pro-kinetics to help the gastrointestinal system keep working, keeping the rabbit calm and warm, maintaining proper hydration, frequent supplementary feeding with a formula such as Oxbow Critical Care, and supporting the rabbit on his or her chest with a rolled up towel.

Complications of this syndrome can include [gastrointestinal stasis](#) and hypothermia, which can be minimized by appropriate feeding and housing during this time.

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.

