

A Rabbit Can't Use Its Hind Legs

A Holland Lop rabbit suddenly stops using its hind legs and its owner wonders why.

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Q: I have a male Holland Lop rabbit named Eddy Rabbit. I thought he was about 3. Over Thanksgiving weekend, he was missing. I came to find out he was under the deck and not moving his rear legs. I took him to the vet, and she said he is closer to 5 years old. I had X-rays done, blood taken and she put him on Metacam for pain. He was still hopping out of necessity, but not because he wanted to.

On December 9, I noticed him dragging his rear end, not hopping at all, or walking like he was the night before. In the X-rays, he is very healthy and everything is functioning properly. The vet says it is arthritis. The kicker is, he is still eating and drinking more than ever. His bowel movements are just fine. He acts like he is a baby, moving only his front end. It's like it's not fazing him.

I don't know what my next step should be. Will he ever regain use of his hind legs? Do they make wheels for disabled rabbits? I have a call in to the vet for more testing. Eddy Rabbit is our family jewel. If anything would help, please let me know.

A: Yes, they do make wheeled carts for rabbits, but let's hope your rabbit is not at that point. Your rabbit could have a neurologic, a muscular, a bony or a systemic disorder causing this problem. If his radiographs are perfect, then it is unlikely that arthritis of his back or rear legs is causing this problem. And most rabbits with arthritis improve dramatically with the use of Metacam (meloxicam) at the proper dose and frequency.

If there was a problem with his spine or other nerves, this should have come up on his examination. The same would be true of a muscular problem. If he is still able to urinate on his own, then it is unlikely to be a spinal problem. If he cannot urinate, this is likely a neurological disorder.

It is very, very infrequent, but sometimes, even with all of our diagnostic tests, we do not find a reason for the loss of movement in the rear legs. It sounds like your doctor is doing an excellent job in trying to find a reason for Eddy's problems. Go back to your doctor and see if further tests are able to help diagnose Eddy's problems.