

Rabbit GI Stasis Danger

Know the signs of gastrointestinal stasis in rabbits.

By Rabbits USA editors

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If a rabbit refuses to eat for more than 12 hours, it could be suffering from gastrointestinal stasis, which is an emergency.

Rabbits are very good at hiding illness. Your pet rabbit can't tell you when something is wrong — but, oftentimes, its body can. It's up to you to know what signs of illness to look for to know if your rabbit is sick.

Gastrointestinal Stasis (GI Stasis)

Signs Observed

Lack of appetite, refusal to eat for 12 hours or longer and/or audible stomach rumbling

What It Might Mean & What To Do

Gastrointestinal Stasis (GI Stasis) — With GI Stasis, the gastrointestinal system begins to shut down, causing its contents to accumulate into a mass of food, hair (from the rabbit grooming itself) and mucus. Because the stomach is slow to empty, dangerous gas begins to build up, which causes the rabbit pain and discomfort, leading to anorexia (refusal to eat). The slow down in gut motility allows bacterial toxins to begin to form in the stomach and small intestines. If GI stasis isn't treated at the first sign of symptoms, it is often fatal. Immediately take your pet to a rabbit-savvy vet if it hasn't eaten within a 12-hour period.

GI stasis is often the result of a diet lacking sufficient fiber or diets high in fats, carbohydrates and sugar. Feed your rabbit unlimited amounts of hay, which will help keep its GI tract moving, as well as a balanced diet. GI upset can also occur due to a hairball (the fiber from generous amounts of hay will help deter hairball formation) and/or ingestion of foreign materials, such as carpet or plastic. Make sure the areas your rabbit is allowed to explore are free of dangerous materials.

Wool Block

Signs Observed

A swollen, "doughy" abdomen, often with the presence of hair in the fecal droppings (droppings strung together with hair), lack of appetite.

What It Might Mean & What To Do

An accumulation of hair in the GI tract due to hair ingestion (wool block), or a slow down of the GI tract (gut stasis), which allows hair to accumulate in the GI tract.

Wool block can be the result of insufficient fiber in the diet and/or ingestion of excess amounts of hair either during self-grooming or in a dominant rabbit that pulls and chews the hair of subordinates. Like cats, rabbits meticulously groom themselves. However, unlike cats, rabbits cannot regurgitate/vomit the ingested hair. This excess hair can develop into a stomach blockage and GI upset, which can be fatal if left untreated.

Long-haired breeds are more susceptible to wool block as are rabbits that don't eat large enough quantities of fiber (hay) or lack a balanced diet. Be diligent about brushing/grooming your rabbit to keep hair ingestion minimal. Long-haired breeds, such as Angoras and American Fuzzy Lops, generally require daily or at least biweekly brushing. Offer your rabbit a high-fiber diet that includes a plentiful supply of hay. Check with your vet for safe hairball remedies.

Change In Droppings

Signs Observed

Change in size and consistency of droppings

What it Might Mean & What To Do

Smaller and/or less frequent than usual droppings may indicate that the rabbit is not eating as much, or has gastrointestinal stasis or blockage. Larger or less well-formed droppings can signify the start of gastrointestinal problems



such as diarrhea. Rabbits can get diarrhea from parasites, changes in the gastrointestinal flora or during the administration of antibiotics. If you notice the above changes in your rabbit's droppings call your vet.