

Surgery and Rabbits

Rabbits and Surgery: What to Expect and How to Care for Them

At some point, your rabbit may need surgery—whether it's for routine procedures like neutering or for addressing other health conditions. Knowing how to prepare and care for your bunny before and after surgery can ease your mind and help your rabbit recover smoothly.



Why Might My Rabbit Need Surgery?

There are a few common reasons why your rabbit might need surgery:

- **Neutering (spaying or castration):** Neutering is essential for both male and female rabbits to prevent unwanted litters, reduce territorial behaviour, and avoid serious illnesses like uterine cancer in females. Typically, female rabbits can be spayed from around six months of age, while males can be neutered at four or five months. Your vet will guide you on the best timing.
- **Dental Disease:** Rabbits' teeth grow continuously, and if they're not worn down properly through diet, their cheek teeth (molars) can overgrow, causing painful spurs. This condition often requires trimming under anesthesia. Some breeds, like lops and dwarf rabbits, are more prone to dental issues because their teeth can overcrowd in their narrow faces.
- **Abscesses:** Abscesses are painful lumps caused by infections, often related to bites, scratches, or dental disease. Unlike abscesses in other animals, rabbits develop dry, thick pus, so they usually need surgery to remove it. These wounds are often left open to heal from the inside out.

If your rabbit needs surgery for another reason, your vet will walk you through the options and explain what to expect.

Is Surgery Safe for Rabbits?

Like any animal or person, there's a small risk associated with anaesthesia, but vets are experienced in treating rabbits, and surgery is only recommended when it's in your rabbit's best interest. To ease your concerns, ask your vet about the precautions they take to keep your rabbit safe during anaesthesia.

It's a good idea to have your rabbit checked before surgery, especially if they're older or have had any respiratory issues like snuffles. This pre-surgery check-up will ensure they're in good health.

Tip: Consider doing some research and talking to different vet practices to find one with a good understanding of rabbit care.



What Happens on the Day of Surgery?

On surgery day, your vet will usually ask you to drop your rabbit off in the morning. Bring them in a comfortable pet carrier or box, labeled with your name and address. You might want to ask your vet if you can bring your rabbit's bonded companion along for support, as having a friend nearby can reduce stress.

You'll need to sign a consent form and provide a contact number before leaving. For routine surgeries like neutering, your rabbit may only need to stay for the day, but if they take longer to recover from anaesthesia, they might need to stay overnight. Your vet will let you know when they're ready to come home.

Should I Feed My Rabbit Before Surgery?

Yes! Unlike many other animals, rabbits don't need to be starved before surgery. In fact, it's important that they continue eating normally to avoid complications. Take some of their usual food with you to the vet—bringing along their favourite snacks can help tempt them to eat after surgery.

Caring for Your Rabbit After Surgery

When your rabbit comes home, they'll likely be sleepy, but if they seem overly weak or reluctant to move, contact your vet right away. It's a good idea to have your vet's emergency number handy just in case.



Here are some tips to help your rabbit recover comfortably:

- **Keep Them Warm:** On the way home, cover your rabbit with a blanket to keep them cozy. Once at home, place them in a warm, quiet room while they recover.
- **Avoid Shavings:** If your rabbit has stitches or a wound, remove any wood shavings from their bedding to keep the area clean and prevent infection.
- **Follow Vet Instructions:** Make sure you give your rabbit their medication on time and as prescribed. If you're unsure about dosages, don't hesitate to call your vet for clarification.
- **Check Their Wound Daily:** Examine the surgery site at least once a day. If you notice any bleeding, swelling, discharge, or if your rabbit pulls at their stitches, contact your vet immediately.
- **Monitor Droppings:** Keep an eye on their droppings—it might take a day or two for them to return to normal, but they should still be passing some after surgery. If not, this could be a sign of GI stasis, which is dangerous in rabbits.
- **Attend Follow-Up Appointments:** Your vet will likely schedule post-op visits to ensure your rabbit is healing properly.

Feeding Your Rabbit After Surgery



Encourage your rabbit to eat when they come home by offering fresh herbs or grass. If they refuse to eat after 24 hours, call your vet immediately, as rabbits' digestive systems need to keep moving. You may need to provide syringe feeds to help keep their gut functioning.

If your rabbit isn't eating on their own, your vet may guide you through assisted feeding, using a syringe to give them a critical care formula or softened pellets.

Signs of Illness After Surgery

It's crucial to watch for any signs of complications after surgery. Contact your vet or an emergency service if your rabbit:

- Isn't eating
- Stops passing droppings
- Hunches in pain
- Refuses to move
- Has a bleeding or weeping wound
- Develops lumps or abscesses at the surgery site

Acting quickly can greatly improve your rabbit's chance of a full recovery.



By staying attentive and following these care tips, you can help your rabbit through surgery and ensure they bounce back as soon as possible.