

All About Pets

The national pet care information service



RABBITS AND OPERATIONS



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Most rabbits will have an operation at some stage in their life, for example neutering (spaying or castration) or to treat a disease.

Nowadays most operations in rabbits are fairly safe but the success of treatment and recovery depends to some extent on the quality of care that the owner gives before and after the operation.



What do I do before the operation?

If the operation is not an emergency it may be useful for you to arrange some time off work so that you are around to take care of your rabbit during the recovery period. The risks of any complications during or after surgery have been much reduced by improvements in surgical techniques and in the safety of the anaesthetics used. Since the stress of an operation can lower your rabbit's resistance to diseases get your pet checked by a vet before it has an operation.

If you have other pets, such as dogs and cats, that have had operations, you will know that it is usual practice not to give the animal anything to eat from the evening before the operation. Fasting reduces the risk of vomiting when an animal is anaesthetised. However, rabbits are a special case as it is not possible for them to vomit, therefore fasting rabbits before an operation is unnecessary and could even be harmful.

It is also extremely important that rabbits start eating soon after surgery. Ensure that you have your rabbit's favourite foods available, such as fresh grass.

What happens on the day of the operation?

Most veterinary clinics do their routine operations in the late morning or early afternoon. Your vet will ask you to take your rabbit to the surgery at a particular time. It is important not to be late so that there is time to prepare your rabbit for its anaesthetic. Bring your rabbit to the surgery in a proper plastic carrying box marked with your name and address. Before the operation your rabbit will be given a sedative. A small patch of fur may be shaved from your rabbit's leg or ear so that your vet can give intravenous injections or fit instruments to monitor the animal during the anaesthetic. When you leave your rabbit you will be asked to sign a consent form stating that you know the purpose of the operation and agree to have it done.



When will my rabbit be able to come home?

When your rabbit is admitted for its operation, you will be asked to leave a telephone number where you can be contacted and you will usually be told a time when you can ring to check on your pet's progress. After routine operations most rabbits should be ready to come home within a few hours of waking up from the anaesthetic. Some animals take longer to come round and your vet will not allow your rabbit to leave the veterinary practice until it is properly awake.

What happens when I pick my rabbit up from the practice?

Remember to take your rabbit's carrying case if you did not leave it at the practice. If your rabbit has undergone a neutering operation or has had surgery on its stomach or bladder, it is best to replace any woodshavings, sawdust, hay or straw in the carrying case with clean newspaper or a towel. This helps to keep the wound clean and reduces the risk of infection.

At the practice the vet or veterinary nurse will tell you when your rabbit can be allowed food and water, whether it will need any medication and when it will need to be brought back to have its stitches (sutures) removed. Check that painkillers have been used if necessary as pain may stop your pet from eating.

What should I do when I get my rabbit home?

Keep your rabbit warm on its journey home. If your rabbit lives outdoors, bring its hutch inside and place it in a warm, quiet room (if the hutch is too large, the carrying case will do). Remove any sawdust/straw bedding from the hutch or box and replace with layers of clean newspaper. Provide water and tempting food, such as fresh greens and carrots, to get your rabbit eating as soon as possible. Some rabbits can be really thirsty after anaesthetic and may need assistance to drink.

Keep your rabbit inside for at least 24 hours. Try to keep it quiet because any sudden movements may put a strain on the stitches. Your vet may prescribe painkillers, antibiotics or some other drugs to keep your pet comfortable and prevent infection. Many owners find it helpful to draw up a chart and tick off each dose when it is given so that nothing is forgotten.

Will my rabbit be ill after the anaesthetic?

It is quite common for a rabbit to appear 'groggy' for a few hours after a general anaesthetic and it may sleep longer and more deeply than normal. Your rabbit may be a little unsteady on its feet.

What are the signs of more serious problems?

If your rabbit is still dull, moving unsteadily or has not eaten when it has been home for 24 hours you should call your vet for advice. If the stitches have come out or split or there are any convulsions (fits), swellings, or bleeding from the operation wound contact your vet immediately.

How do I stop my rabbit pulling its stitches out?

Most rabbits will try to nibble their stitches and many vets now use a type of stitch that is completely buried under the skin and so cannot be chewed. Elizabethan collars are best avoided in rabbits unless essential. For an operation on its body, dressings can be kept in place using the leg of a pair of tights.

Further information

For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk, the national pet care information service. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is provided by The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity. We rely entirely on your support to enable us to continue our vital work. Any contribution would be most welcome. Thank you.



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