

How to Examine a Rabbit

This paper summarizes how to examine a rabbit, which should be done monthly. It is intended for rabbit owners (not vets) who know how to do an exam & simply summarizes the steps. It is not intended to give “how to” details, diagnose diseases, nor give information about what to do if anything is found wrong (contact your vet for that). Note: turn a rabbit on its back ONLY if you know how to do this safely; otherwise, the rabbit could be gravely injured.

Hands On

Fur, Skin, Body (run hands along bottom of jaw & dewlap, chest; around eyes, along head, neck, back, sides, rump, tail, legs, abdomen)

bad: dandruff; fleas; black specks (flea poop); dirty or rough coat; matted fur; thin/bald spots, skin red or with dry crust; cuts; scabs; lumps (especially with small hole); fluid collecting under skin; abdomen swollen or very hard; any body part sensitive to touch, e.g., abdomen, base of ear, jaw; one side different from other side

Ears (inside & outside)

bad: wax; scabs; red; oozing; swollen; odor

Eyes

good: inside of upper & lower eye lids, pink

bad: red, cloudy, discoloration, spots on eyes; mucus; runny; bulging or swelling; crusty; partially open; matted fur at corner (small “sleepers” in corners ok); inside of upper & lower eye lids, red or cyst

***** Turn rabbit on back for rest of this section *****

Mouth, Teeth

good: gums pale pink; breath sweet

bad: teeth not aligned, overgrown, broken, loose, discolored; drooling; wet chin, chest or dewlap; gums bright red, blue, gray or white; sores; fur loss under chin

Nose

good: membranes pale pink

bad: wet; mucus; dirty; membranes bright red, blue, gray or white; sores

Feet (check bottoms of feet & between toes; move fur to examine skin)

bad: poop; sore hocks (red bare skin, scabs, open wounds); missing, crooked or sore toes; long, torn or bleeding nails; inside of front legs wet or matted

Genital Area

good: determine sex

bad: anything unusual on anal or urogenital area; caked secretion or tumor in anal glands; stained or wet fur; urine scald; red or inflamed skin; poopy butt; sores; small, white firm projections; mucus discharge

Hands Off

Weight

bad: over/under weigh

Poop

good: poop moist, same size as always, round

bad: irregularly shaped or sized poop; poop strung together like beads; soft or extra dry poop; diarrhea; contains blood, mucus, undigested food or maggots; having no poop in 12 hrs.; goopy cecals

Urine

good: various colors, including red, is often ok

bad: toothpaste like consistency; blood clots (red spots or flakes); gritty; straining to urinate; having no urine; leaking urine; holding butt very high when urinating

Gait, Movement

good: sits, hops & moves normally; good balance

bad: limps; wobbles; odd movements; head tilt; difficulty eating; odd mouth movements; frequent head shaking (quick head binky ok); excessive ear or body scratching; excessive licking of chest or dewlap

Noises

bad: loud teeth grinding (soft teeth purrs ok); unusual vocalization; frequent sneezing; noisy breathing; rattle in chest; labored breathing (long hard breaths); very loud or no gut sounds

Daily Observations

If you are able to observe the rabbit daily, you can also make these observations.

Eating Behavior, Poop

bad: eating less than usual; not eating at all for 12 hrs.; not eating favorite foods; change in poop (size, color, odor, consistency, shape, amount); stops pooping in litter box

Drinking Behavior, Urine

bad: drinking more or less water than usual; not drinking at all for 12 hrs.; change in urine (color, texture, odor, amount); stops peeing in litter box

Movement

bad: sitting in hunched position; less active; difficulty moving

Temperature (take temperature if seems sick and know how to do it)

good: 100 - 103 deg. F (38 - 39 deg. C)

bad: anything else

Other

bad: sudden change in weight (weigh once a month); different respiration rate; different heart sounds; different coat condition (e.g., rough fur), change in behavior