

Senior Rabbit Care

Paula Watkins, HRS Educator

WHAT IS A SENIOR RABBIT?



Signs of Aging

- Can start as early as 4-5 or as late as 10-12; depends on breed (size), diet, genetics
- More napping
- Less binkies
- Stiffness
- Change in litterbox habits
- Change in eating habits, including weight loss/gain

Conditions seen in old age

- Arthritis
- Incontinence - from muscle loss or infection
- Dental - infection or overgrowth of teeth
- Muscle loss, weakness
- Sight and hearing loss
- Sore hocks (pododermatitis)
- Diseases - heart disease, kidney disease, respiratory disease, cancer, stroke, osteoporosis

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HOW TO HELP SENIOR RABBITS

Establish plan with vet - physical 1-2 times per year depending on condition, blood-work, x ray



Setup

- Single story as open as possible
- Free range rabbits may need space limited if mobility or sight becomes an issue
- Flooring should be soft carpet or fleece
- Low-sided litterbox; Can cut down one side of regular litterbox, sand edges
- If incontinent, layer washable pee pads on bottom and cover with Sherpa fleece on top to keep rabbit dry; Change daily
- Place pillows, stuffies, HopNFlop in area for support
- Food and water bowls should be easily accessible
- Consider a fan and/or portable heater, hot water bottle or Snuggle Safe as Senior Buns often get too cool or too warm

Diet

- If overweight - cut back on pellets, or greens if poopy butt present
- If underweight - add small amount alfalfa pellets, hay, oats or critical care to diet

Exercise

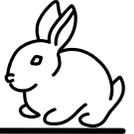
- Foraging toys, logic toys, hiding treats, lots of petting and cuddles

Hygiene

- Frequent grooming - fur, nails, ears
- Sore hocks - check with vet to see if they need treatment, keep nails short, surface soft
- Urine scald or cecals caked to butt - usually in arthritic bunnies or those with hind end weakness; Some will drop cecals and eat them that way; Butt bath or learn to express bladder; disabledrabbits.com gives good description of bathing rabbits

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QUALITY OF LIFE



How to Know When to Say When

- Important decision for people with senior rabbits - ongoing decision over several months
- No Suffering Zone - how to know your rabbit is not suffering as they are prey animals

Pain : Signs of pain

- Hunched posture
- Teeth grinding - louder than purring
- Eyes squinting
- Body tense
- Refusing food
- Change in normal behavior - excessive digging, chewing at body parts
- Work with vet for maximum pain relief

Appetite

- Does your rabbit still enjoy eating without being force fed?

Hygiene

- Does your rabbit still groom himself?
- Can you keep your rabbit clean and dry? Urine scald is painful, as is infection you cannot get rid of

Attitude

- Is your rabbit content?
- Laying in a comfortable position?
- Curious about their surroundings? Interested in you? Likes affection?
- Still enjoying their favorite treats and toys ?

Difficult questions to answer, and the signs will come on gradually; When they have given up you can usually see it in their eyes

Euthanasia vs. Dying at Home



- If rabbit is comfortable may pass at home - No Suffering Rule
- If they are in pain, cannot get comfortable, need your assistance; Eating not necessary at end

This is an ongoing process, requires vigilance. Ask your vet, bring bunny in for opinion if in doubt; Kindest thing you can do for your friend is to ease his suffering