Hock Sores (Pododermatitis) in Rabbits

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

tips for healthy rabbit feet

Pododermatitis, often referred to as hock sores, commonly occurs in rabbits. It usually affects the bottom of the hind feet and hocks (the lower part of the leg that touches the ground when the animal is sitting). "Podo" refers to the foot, and "dermatitis" refers to inflammation of the skin.

What Causes Pododermatitis?

Excessive pressure on the foot may cause loss of the course, protective hair around the foot, as well as calluses. It may also damage the skin, causing open wounds and infection of the tissues, and even the bones, of the feet. The pressure most often occurs if a large rabbit is housed on hard floors or wire floors. It is more common in hot, humid weather and in larger rabbits.

Factors that may predispose an animal to developing pododermatitis include:

- Decreased hair on the foot, which may be the result of heredity (Rex breeds of rabbits) or housing on a wet surface (e.g., damp resting board, or wet bedding)
- Large size or obesity
- Lack of movement in a small cage
- Abrasions from rough, irregular, or wire floors
- Poor sanitation

What are the Signs of Pododermatitis?

Animals with pododermatitis may begin to favor one of their hind feet or appear lame and reluctant to walk. There may be loss of hair on the affected foot, thickening of the skin, swelling, redness, and sometimes open, draining areas or scabs. It is a painful condition that may cause your rabbit to become depressed and not eat.

How is pododermatitis treated?

For mild cases (slight swelling and redness), simply changing the environment and diet of the animal may be all that is needed. This may include providing:

- A smoother floor
- Softer and thicker bedding
- Dry surfaces
- Increased cleanliness
- Fewer calories (if your animal is overweight)

For more severe cases, veterinary attention is needed. Radiographs (x-rays) may be taken to determine if there is any bone infection. The animal will be placed on antibiotics and pain relievers, if indicated. Surgery may be necessary to remove and dead or dying tissue. The feet may need to be soaked and bandaged.

How can pododermatitis be prevented?

Pododermatitis can easily be prevented by providing the right environment and diet for the animal. Measures include:

- Maintaining good sanitation: regular

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cleaning of the cage and litter box

- Providing good flooring: smooth and dry
- Supplying soft, thick, dry, clean bedding
- Daily checking of the feet
- Preventing animals from becoming overweight by feeding a good diet
- Clipping toenails regularly
- Providing a large enough cage or area for exercise

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