

Rabbits with Genetic Splay-Leg

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Warning: this file contains pictures that may be distressing for some persons.

A young rabbit suffering from this condition loses gradually the ability to adduct one to all four limbs. It can affect the fore- and/or hind limbs, which become twisted, so that the animal has a double-jointed posture. The rabbit can no more put weight on its limbs and ambulation becomes difficult due to the inability to adduct the limbs. The severity of the condition ranges from light to paralysis.

Though various causes can lead to splay-leg in rabbits, the condition is generally inherited in one or more

recessive genes with reduced expressivity and possible involvement of environmental factors.

Other causes are traumatic or iatrogenic. The latter applies to newborn rabbit(s) that are overfed by the doe, or that is (are) living in a nest with a slippery surface due to lack of bedding.

Clinical signs

A rabbit suffering from genetic splay-leg eats normally, and has a general healthy appearance. The only clinical signs are difficult ambulation, by wriggling along



VEIN (Veterinary Exotic Information Network) System,



Kate Jenkins

Rabbits with unilateral (left) and bilateral splayed hindlimbs (right)





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Rabbit showing splayed legs in hind limbs and left forelimb.



on its belly or chest.

When a rabbit is seen with splay-legs, the first steps should be to check for physical deformities. X-rays will expose skeletal deformities like:

- pelvic hypoplasia, with femoral luxation,
- torsion or subluxation of the hip,
- femoral neck anteversion,
- femoral shaft torsion,
- distal foreleg curvature,
- achondroplasia (growth impairment) of the hip or shoulder joints,
- syringomyelia (chronic progressive disease, characterized by the appearance of fluid-filled pockets in the spinal cord).

Treatment

There is no treatment for splay-leg, so each case should be evaluated on an individual basis. Indeed, rabbits showing light deformities can move around quite

well and thus have a good quality of life. In other cases, amputation of the affected limb may be considered. For rabbits severely affected by splay-leg, euthanasia may be overweighed.

Secondary skin complications may develop, in areas that wear the body weight. Skin ulceration (sore lesions) and pododermatitis are most frequently observed.

Acknowledgement

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Further information

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Ventral view of a rabbit with unilateral splayed hindlimb (left) and three splayed limbs (right)



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