



The Strawberry Foundation

Sterilising Your Bunny

Bunnies should only be sterilised by vets with exotic pet experience. Vets are not all skilled in dealing with bunnies.

IMPORTANCE OF STERILISING YOUR BUNNY

Sterilising your bunny is one of the first things you need to do. Bunnies benefit from being sterilised for the following reasons:

- ✓ Bunnies become hormonal and this can happen as early as when they are six weeks old. These hormones lead to destructive behaviour, including biting, circling their humans, spraying urine, and humping other animals and small toys. These hormones can and will soon make them aggressive towards other bunnies and humans. Sterilising them allows them to settle and calm down and become manageable pets.
- ✓ Studies show that 80% of unsterilized bunnies fall ill from cancer. Females tend to develop uterine cancer and males tend to develop testicular cancer. Bunnies often won't display any signs of illness until it is too late to treat. Sterilising prevents cancer and thus prevents a painful death.
- ✓ Bunnies need to bond with a partner. They usually prefer bonding to a partner bunny of the opposite gender. However, if they are not sterilised, they will mate and produce babies. A female bunny can have up to 12 babies in a litter and can deliver a new litter every 28 days. This quickly adds up – a female bunny can easily have 100+ babies in one year. An actively producing female bunny can easily die from exhaustion.

CARING FOR YOUR BUNNY BEFORE AND AFTER SURGERY

Please read through the following summary of an article by Dr Dana Krempels, PhD of the University of Miami, Department of Biology.

PRE-OPERATIVE CARE:

1. Use a veterinarian who is very familiar with the bunnies' unique anatomy and physiology, and who has experience and success with bunny anaesthesia and surgery.
2. Schedule the surgery so that you can bring your bunny home with you the same evening. Avoid having your bunny spending the night in the hospital.
3. If your bunny is bonded to another bunny, it is important to bring them to the hospital together so that the mate can offer moral support. This would avoid them un-bonding.
4. DO NOT FAST YOUR BUNNY PRIOR TO THE SURGICAL APPOINTMENT, even if the person scheduling your appointment tells you to do so. Receptionists giving such instructions often recite the rules for dogs and cats, not realizing that the rules are different for bunnies.
5. Take a bit of your bunny's normal food (pellets and hay) along as well as a small bag of favourite fresh herbs. Ask that the foods be offered to your bunny after the anaesthesia has worn off. The sooner bunny starts nibbling after surgery, the quicker the recovery.

THE HEALING PROCESS:

If all goes well, your bunny will start to perk up noticeably by the second day after surgery. Healing begins quickly; adhesions (normal tissue repair) usually start to form within 24 hours of surgery in bunnies.

- A male is usually ready for normal activity within a few days of neutering.
- A female might take a bit longer to recover from a spay.

Recovery time will depend on the type of surgery, the surgeon's technique, the surgery itself, and any complications.

POST-SURGICAL CARE:

Pain management:

- Any surgery, including a neuter or (especially) a spay, will make bunny sore for a few days.
- Pain management in bunnies is critical to uneventful recovery.
- Most experienced vets routinely administer analgesics such as Metacam / Petcam / Inflacam before or shortly after surgery, so the bunny will be as comfortable as possible while waking up.
- Ask the veterinarian about this before scheduling surgery. If no pain medications are going to be given to your bunny, you should probably seek a different vet.

Providing care and warmth

- Immediately after surgery, keep your bunny warm and quiet.
- Provide a warm water bottle or other heat source (that can't leak, burn, or cause injury) wrapped in a soft towel for bunny to lean against or move away from, at his/her discretion. DO NOT use any type of electrical heating source that could be an electrocution risk, should bunny chew on it!

Contact and handling

- Don't hover. A bunny after surgery may feel groggy and unhappy, and not in the mood for cuddling.
- Unless you know that your bunny wants cuddling, it's best to let him/her recover quietly and without more human interruption than is necessary to ensure that all is well.

Monitoring the wound

- Be sure to carefully (and gently) check the sutures daily for a few days after surgery to be sure the bunny isn't chewing them.
- Many vets use subcuticular (under the skin) sutures that cannot be chewed out, and may even put a line of surgical glue over the incision for extra strength.
- Be alert for excessive bleeding (a bit of oozing is not unusual, but outright bleeding is a cause for concern).
- Excessive redness or signs of infection such as swelling or pus are not normal.
- If you see anything that causes concern, call the vet immediately for further instructions.

Monitoring the poop: signs of recovery or trouble

- It is not unusual to see a few soft or mucus-covered stools after surgery. faecal pellets should return to normal within a day or two, once your bunny has regained normal eating habits.
- If you continue to see mucus in the faecal matter beyond a day or two, or if faecal production stops, consult your veterinarian immediately.
- If your bunny hasn't eaten anything within 24 hours of surgery, contact your veterinarian.
- If your bunny does not make any poops within a few hours after surgery, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Preventive care

- Under normal circumstances, bunnies do not require post-surgical antibiotics to prevent infection.
- Except in very unusual cases, an E-collar ("Elizabethan collar" -- that plastic cone around the neck that prevents suture chewing and makes your companion look like a satellite dish) is not necessary for a bunny, and will cause more stress than it's worth.

Social interaction

- Keep your bunny quiet for a few days after surgery, but try to maintain normal feeding and bonding times.
- There is no reason to separate bonded pairs or groups as long as the bunnies interact calmly.
- A post-surgical bunny will usually manage his/her own activity quite well, and knows not to "push it" too soon.
- If your bonded pair continues to mount or play too roughly after surgery, then it might be necessary to physically separate them for a day or two to avoid injury. This is almost never necessary.
- However, if you must separate the bunnies, be sure they can see, smell, and touch one another even if they don't have full physical contact.
- Remember: the bunny who has undergone surgery needs the emotional support of his/her mate for an uneventful recovery. Allowing them to be

in contact reduces the chances that they will fight upon full re-introduction.

Nutrition

- Offer your bunny a heavy ceramic bowl of water, even if you usually provide a sipper bottle. A bunny needs to drink after surgery, but often won't do so if s/he has to "work" for water. A well-hydrated bunny recovers more quickly and feels better in the process.
- If your bunny is reluctant to eat after surgery, offer a favourite treat. Fragrant herbs such as basil, parsley, dill and mint seem to appeal to a bunny recovering from surgery.
- If your bunny does suffer complications from surgery that cause him to stop eating, you may need to hand-feed for a few days afterwards to help get the GI tract back to normal. Ask your veterinarian for advice about whether this is necessary. Products made specifically for recovery feeding include Critical Care (Oxbow Hay Company) and Critter be Better (American Pet Diner)** these are not readily available in SA. Or you can make your own recovery food:
 - Pour warm water or chamomile tea over a 1/4 cup of pellets in a bowl
 - Allow to sit for about five minutes, letting the pellets "fluff"
 - Add additional water or chamomile tea and mix well to make a pudding-like slurry
 - Always use any type of recovery food "slurry" with caution:
 - Never force too much. Allow bunny time to chew and swallow.
 - Use a wide-bore syringe or plastic dropper with the narrow tip cut off to safely administer
 - If the tip is too narrow, larger bits can get stuck. Forcing a stuck chunk through the tip can cause a huge blob of food to enter the mouth too quickly, and could cause aspiration.
 - Squirt the food into the mouth sideways, behind the incisors, not straight back.
 - NEVER try to force feed an animal who is not swallowing normally. Consult your veterinarian immediately if this is the case.

Stitches:

- Please check with your veterinarian what type of stitches were used:
 - Dissolvable stitches can be left to dissolve on their own.
 - Normal stitches must be removed 2 weeks after surgery.
- ❖ NOTE THAT MALES MAY HAVE VIABLE SPERM FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AFTER NEUTERING! Do not place your male with an unsterilized female until a minimum of three weeks after his neuter surgery! Some males can retain viable sperm for even longer.

Reference:

Article from www.bio.miami.edu/hare/opcare.html