Abscesses are a kind of infection

Abscesses are relatively common in rabbits and are often discovered as a soft to somewhat firm swelling on a rabbit’s body. Rabbit abscesses usually consist of a thick fibrous capsule that contains very thick pus. Pus is composed of neutrophils (a type of white blood cell involved in infection and inflammation), fluid, and cellular debris. Abscesses in rabbits usually increase in size over a period of days to weeks and are relatively painless.

Although abscesses in rabbits most commonly develop in the head and limbs, they may occur anywhere on the body. Rabbit abscesses can be external (in the skin or under the skin, or associated with the face/jaw or joints) or internal (in the nasal passages, in the area behind the eye, in the ear, or in the abdominal or chest cavities.)

Watch for signs of abscesses

Abscesses in rabbits most often occur from bacterial infections, but can be secondary to foreign bodies (a piece of hay that lodges in the nasal cavity) and occasionally from other issues such as cancer. Dental disease is a very common problem in rabbits and elongated, overgrowing premolar and molar tooth roots can cause damage to the maxilla (upper jaw) and mandible (lower jaw). This can allow bacteria from the mouth to invade and damage the underlying bone. Infections can potentially spread from a primary site, such as an infected tooth root, through the blood to other parts of the body. Wounds can also introduce infectious bacteria into the body and lead to abscesses.

Problematic tooth roots from the maxillary teeth can invade the nasal cavity or retrobulbar space behind the eye, resulting in clinical signs such as bulging of the eye from the socket, blockage of the tear ducts and subsequent tearing or discharge from the eye, congestion of the nasal cavity and nasal discharge. Abnormal mandibular (lower jaw) teeth often result in lumps that can be felt on the lower jaw. It is important to note that malocclusion or angling of the incisor (front) teeth may be secondary to disease of the cheek teeth (molars and premolars).

Diagnosing rabbit abscesses and testing for infection type

There are a number of different bacterial organisms that can cause abscesses in rabbits. Organisms most often found associated with rabbit abscesses include Staphylococcus aureus, Pasteurella multocida, Pseudomonas aeruginosa, Proteus.
species, Fusobacteria species, Bacteroides species, and Actinomyces species.

Whenever possible, it is important to have a sample of the pus from an abscess sent in for diagnostic testing. Culturing the sample allows identification of the bacterial organism(s) causing the infection. Antibiotic sensitivity testing is then done to determine which antibacterial drug(s) should help resolve the infection. Because different bacteria are often sensitive or resistant to different antibiotics, if one only guesses at what type of bacteria are causing the infection and which antibiotics might help, then time and money may be wasted on ineffective antibiotic treatments, and the rabbit may have to unnecessarily live longer with a persistent infection.

If an infection is associated with the head or limbs, a radiograph (x-ray) should be taken to determine if underlying bone is affected. Radiographs can also be useful in determining if pneumonia or lung abscesses are present. Ultrasounds and computed tomography (CT) scans may help define abscess margins (which can be particularly important with retrobulbar abscesses and abscesses that are located in the abdominal cavity.)

**Treatment depends on location and type of abscesses**

Treatment of an abscess often depends on the location and extent of the abscess and whether or not the abscess can be completely removed surgically or can only be reduced and cleaned. Because rabbit abscesses are usually walled off by a thick capsule, lancing and draining the abscess usually does not result in resolution of the problem. Isolated abscesses should be removed surgically in their entirety if possible and care should be taken not to rupture the abscess during the removal process. Rupturing the abscess can lead to contamination of the area and recurrence of the infection.

Unfortunately there are some areas where removal of the entire capsule is not possible, such as with ear and jaw abscesses. In these cases, the abscess site is usually cleaned and as much of the capsule is removed as possible. If joints are affected, then limb amputation may be necessary. Enucleation (removal of the eye) may be necessary with retrobulbar abscesses. The primary cause of the infection, such as foreign bodies or dental disease should be addressed to minimize the chance of reoccurrence of the infection.

Surgical repair of an abscess is normally followed by a two- to six-week course (sometimes longer) of antibiotics. If an abscess cannot be completely removed with surgery, then the affected soft tissue and bone must be aggressively debrided (removal of dead, damaged, or infected tissue) to improve the healing potential of the remaining healthy tissue. After surgical debridement of an abscess, the site should be flushed with sterile saline or an appropriate flushing solution and the remaining pocket will heal slowly over time. Unfortunately if any infected tissue remains after the abscess debridement, recurrence is likely because antibiotics do not penetrate the thick abscess capsule or its contents easily.

There are a number of ways to administer high levels of antibiotics to an abscess without long-term systemic administration. After aggressive surgical debridement, the residual abscess capsule can be injected with antibiotics. Antibiotic drops, capsules, antibiotic-impregnated beads, or collagen can alternatively be placed into the abscess cavity. Antibiotic-impregnated beads should be left in the site for at least four weeks, but leaving them in place for months can actually serve to encourage abscess formation.

Concentrated sugar solutions are sometimes used as an alternative topical remedy for treating abscess cavities because they have hygroscopic (absorb moisture) and bactericidal properties. In addition to hygroscopic effects, honey has other antibacterial properties and stimulates wound healing. Honey has been shown to be effective against a range of bacteria and has been used for centuries to treat wounds in people. The potency of the honey varies with the flower that it is made from and honey from the New Zealand manuka tree is considered to have the most antibacterial properties. Prior to treatment of an abscess with honey, aggressive surgical debridement and removal of all pus and necrotic tissue from the abscess cavity is necessary.

**Keeping your rabbit happy and healthy**

It is very important to try to keep your rabbit happy and healthy. Be sure that your rabbit is fed a high quality diet, lives in a clean, peaceful environment, gets exercise on a regular basis, and is loved and well cared for. This will minimize stress, improve the rabbit’s immune system, and help reduce the chance of disease. It is known that malnourishment and stress associated with dental disease can delay wound healing. If your rabbit becomes ill and gets an infection, then modifications to your rabbit’s diet and/or husbandry may be necessary to help with recovery.

Editor’s note: Dr. Ramsell’s practice is Northwest Exotic Pet Vet and she can be found at the Beaverton Pet Clinic, 11876 SW Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway, phone (503) 646-6101. The clinic’s web site is www.beavertonpetclinic.com. Dr. Ramsell serves on the board of the Cascade Ferret Network and Rabbit Advocates.
Whole Foods customer bag credit a big win for Rabbit Advocates

A program sponsored by the Tanasbourne Whole Foods grocery store in Hillsboro resulted in a $375 donation to Rabbit Advocates.

Last summer, Whole Foods customers who shopped the Tanasbourne store and who brought in their own grocery bags were offered tokens that they could then drop in a container pre-marked with the names of non-profit organizations. During the months of April through July, 2012, Rabbit Advocates was one of the non-profit organizations featured. During those months, more than 3,750 tokens were dropped into the Rabbit Advocate container. At the end of this bag credit drive, Whole Foods added up the number of tokens for each charity and credited 10 cents for each token. The accounting yielded Rabbit Advocates a donation of more than $375, all from the generosity of Whole Foods shoppers who shopped with their own grocery bags and chose to donate their bag credit to bunnies.

Rabbit Advocates wishes to thank Whole Foods for including bunnies in the choices of non-profit organizations sponsored in the bag credit program. When Whole Foods sponsors this program, it typically features approximately three charities, including one focused on animals. Rabbit Advocates was fortunate to be included as the animal focused charity last year. Rabbit Advocates also would like to thank Whole Foods shoppers who had more than one choice about which charity should receive their token and chose Rabbit Advocates.

Each donation made to the Rabbit Advocates is tax deductible and goes to help rabbits and to offset the expenses of this non-profit organization. These rescue bunnies are, from left to right, Chevette, Celeste, Herman and Cherry, all relaxing together in the shade on a sunny afternoon. (Photo by Theresa Brennan)
“Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month” celebrated

By Guin Boostrom

In February, before the onslaught of the Easter season, the rabbit rescue community celebrated “Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month,” focusing on all of the wonderful reasons to get your next house rabbit from a shelter or rescue rather than a pet store or breeder. A baby bunny purchased at a pet store or from a breeder advertising on Craigslist might be irresistibly cute, but there are thousands of adorable bunnies at shelters and rescue groups across the country waiting for loving forever homes.

The advantages of adopting a rescued rabbit are numerous!

A rescued rabbit will already have had some socialization

As prey animals, rabbits tend to be shy around people, especially if they previously have not been around humans much. Most animal shelters have dedicated volunteers who help socialize rabbits to make sure that the rabbits feel comfortable being handled by people. Rabbit rescue groups usually place rabbits with foster homes where rabbits not only get individualized attention from their foster parents, but also have the chance to get accustomed to the sights, sounds and smells of a human household. A rescue rabbit may still be a bit timid when she comes home with you, but she shouldn’t be aggressive or terrified.

A rescue group will help you find a good match for your household

A pet store will sell you whichever bunny you point to based on its appearance, but an animal shelter or rabbit rescue will ask you questions about yourself and your household and will try to match you with a rabbit that will be a good fit for your situation. For example, if you have dogs or cats at home, a shelter or rescue will be sure to match you with a rabbit who has either successfully lived with other pets or has personality traits that make it likely he can get along with other pets.

A rescued rabbit will already be spayed or neutered

Rabbits adopted from a shelter or rescue group will almost always have been spayed or neutered prior to adoption. Spay or neuter surgery usually costs far more than the adoption fee requested from a shelter.
Kat Slinde counsels a first-time rabbit adopter during the Rabbit Advocate “Sombunny to Love” event held at the Oregon Humane Society. Kat is a volunteer for both Rabbit Advocates and the Oregon Humane Society.

or rescue group, so it is definitely a cost savings to adopt a rescued rabbit. But even more importantly, you’ll be bringing home a rabbit that should not engage in many of the typical hormonally driven destructive behaviors (such as territorial urine marking) that non-altered rabbits may exhibit.

**Any health and/or behavioral problems should already be identified**

A rabbit adopted from a shelter or rescue group will already have had a veterinary exam, and existing medical or behavioral problems should already be identified. Rabbits that have long-term medical issues or who are exceptionally timid after being rescued from a particularly abusive situation will be identified as “special needs,” so that you can make an informed decision about adopting such a pet. And if you do decide that you have room in your heart for a special needs bunny, you will be counseled on what to expect in terms of on-going medical treatment or socialization needed to help your new friend stay healthy and happy.

**Help with bonding to other pets in your household will be offered**

If you adopt a rabbit from a shelter or rescue, they can help you with bonding your new rabbit to an existing rabbit or introducing your new rabbit to dogs or cats in your household. They can often provide you with neutral territory to have an initial introduction, assess whether the new rabbit and existing pets seem likely to have good compatibility based on the initial introduction, and provide you with lots of good advice on how to continue your bonding efforts at home.

**Most compelling—you will save a life**

When you adopt a rescued rabbit, you are helping to save a life. Even if the particular shelter or rescue group is considered a “no-kill” organization, when you adopt from them, you open up another slot for them to take in another rabbit whose life may be in danger. You also help decrease demand for bunnies coming from backyard breeders who typically breed rabbits in extremely undesirable conditions.

If you are ready to open your heart and home to a rescued rabbit, you can find a new friend.
at the following rabbit rescues in Oregon and Washington:

- Rabbit Advocates, Portland, www.rabbitadvocates.org
- Red Barn Rabbit Rescue, Creswell, Oregon, www.redbarnrabbitrescue.org
- Rabbit Haven, Gig Harbor, Washington, www.rabbithaven.org
- River’s Wish Animal Sanctuary, Spokane, www.riverswishanimalssanctuary.org

For a list of rabbit rescues in other parts of the country, check out the House Rabbit Society’s website at www.rabbit.org. Most humane societies and county animal shelters also have rabbits for adoption.

Mary Thompson talked to many potential rabbit adopters during the Rabbit Advocate “Somebunny to Love” event.

Rabbit Advocates celebrate Adopt a Rescued Rabbit Month with “Somebunny to Love” event

Foster rabbits available for adoption, a pet psychic, a kissing booth and a silent auction were all part of the Rabbit Advocate’s “Somebunny to Love” event held January 26 at the Oregon Humane Society. Volunteers answered questions about rabbit behavior and health, worked to bond prospective rabbit pairs and introduced many to the world of rabbits as companion pets.

The event featured foster rabbits and rabbits from the Oregon Humane Society. At least two shelter rabbits were adopted that day and foster rabbits proved popular for their antics and histories. People with questions brought their rabbits to ask about aggressive nipping (volunteers noted the young male rabbit had not yet been neutered and suggested starting behavior modification by altering the bunny), and bonding (a first “date” with foster rabbit Chase was arranged). Education about companion pet rabbits is a focus of the Rabbit Advocates and the special “Somebunny to Love” event.
Oregon Humane Society recognizes rabbit-focused volunteer

Long-time Rabbit Advocate and Oregon Humane Society volunteer Kem Sypher was among those honored during the March 3 awards banquet hosted by the shelter.

The banquet, held at the Portland Art Museum, honored 27 volunteers. Sypher earned the “Faithful Companion” award, recognizing him for his dedication to shelter animals year after year. In 2012, Sypher won an award marking a decade of volunteer service to the shelter.

Rabbit Advocates encourages volunteering at the Oregon Humane Society, especially in the small animal room, where rabbits, birds and rodents are housed. Helping shelter rabbits promotes the Rabbit Advocate mission of promoting the welfare of domestic rabbits. For information on how to volunteer for the Oregon Humane Society, contact the volunteer staff at www.oregonhumane.org.

Rabbit Advocates wins Petco award

The Petco Foundation, a tax exempt non-profit organization, recently awarded Rabbit Advocates a “Tree of Hope” award. The money was collected during the 2012 holiday season and was granted to Rabbit Advocates in January.

“While this past holiday season may have been tough for many, Petco customers, associates and vendors are still very generous in donating to help the animals in their community,” the award said. “This fundraiser had life-affirming results. We are happy to have you share in this generosity.”

Rabbit Advocates is grateful for the award, which will be used for ongoing organizational expenses.

The Petco Foundation was created to raise the quality of life for pets and people who love and need them. The Petco located in Tigard sponsors the monthly Rabbit Advocate adoption outreaches. For more information about the outreaches, see the events calendar at www.rabbitadvocates.org.

Beaverton Pet Clinic clients give holiday gifts to bunnies

During the 2012 holiday season, Beaverton Pet Clinic set up a “giving tree” in the practice’s lobby. On the tree were brightly colored ornaments, color coded and representing three charities: Rabbit Advocates, Cat Adoption Team and Oregon Dog Rescue. Each ornament included a request of a gift that the charities determined would be useful or helpful in caring for animals.

If moved to do so, clients could choose an ornament and give the requested item or gift card. Rabbit Advocates received many of these gifts from Beaverton Pet Clinic clients, including the donation of a brand new travel crate and gift cards for local businesses that sell rabbit supplies.

Rabbit Advocates would like to thank Beaverton Pet Clinic for including the organization in its list of charities and the clients of Beaverton Pet Clinic for their tremendous generosity.
Rabbit Advocates
PO Box 14235
Portland
Oregon
97293-0235
Helpline:
503.617.1625
Website:
rabbitadvocates.org

“Promoting the Welfare of Domestic Rabbits”

Upcoming Meetings & Events 2013

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<th>Bunny’s Best Bites</th>
<th>Education &amp; Adoption Outreaches</th>
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<td>Rabbit Advocates monthly meetings are held at the Oregon Humane Society, 1067 NE Columbia Blvd., usually the third Sunday of each month from 3:30-5:30 p.m. Meetings include a “bunny basics” question and answer session on bunny behavior and care. The public is welcome. Please park in the gravel parking lot just west of the shelter building.</td>
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<td><strong>Hay Packing</strong> Volunteers blend and bag different types of hay to create Bunny’s Best Bites, our own custom blend of hay. For more information about the hay parties, see the Rabbit Advocate website at <a href="http://www.rabbitadvocates.org">www.rabbitadvocates.org</a>.</td>
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