Neutering (de-sexing) of rabbits
Why should I have my rabbit neutered?

Rabbits are social animals and ideally should be kept in pairs or small social groups. Unfortunately, this can lead to a number of problems. Entire male and female rabbits kept together will 'breed like rabbits', even if they are related! Same sex pairs (either male or female) are prone to aggression and fighting with each other. Female rabbits in particular can be very grumpy if left entire (un-neutered). They will often be difficult to handle and not the cuddly companion you would hope for. Some are even actively aggressive towards their owners. Also, with better husbandry and veterinary understanding, our pet rabbits are living longer so we are now seeing health problems which could be prevented by early neutering. In females these include uterine infections (pyometra) and uterine tumours. Both of these conditions are very tricky to treat once they have occurred and sadly usually result in the death or euthanasia of the rabbit.

Male rabbits are also better pets once neutered. It reduces aggression towards owners and makes them less likely to spray urine.

How are female rabbits neutered (spayed)?

The spay procedure is performed under a general anaesthetic (see later). The rabbit has her tummy clipped and a small incision is made. We remove the ovaries and the uterus. The wound is stitched up using absorbable sutures. Usually the stitches in the skin are ‘hidden’ so that she will not be able to chew them later.

How are male rabbit’s neutered (castrated)?

Male rabbits are castrated under general anaesthesia. Small incisions are made on or just in front of the scrotal sac. Both of the testicles are removed. The skin wounds are stitched with absorbable ‘hidden’ sutures. Please note that male rabbits can store semen in their ‘tubes’ for up to three weeks after castration, so they may still be able to make female companions pregnant during this post-operative period.

Is there a risk with the anaesthetic?

There is always a risk with any general anaesthetic and this risk is slightly higher with rabbits. However, rabbit anaesthesia in general and neutering in particular are both now routinely performed and it is very rarely that any problems are encountered. To make general anaesthesia as safe as possible we routinely intubate our rabbit patients. This means that all the time they are anaesthetised there is a tube protecting the airway and carrying oxygen directly to the lungs. A catheter is placed in the rabbit’s vein to allow delivery of emergency drugs or fluids if necessary. Great care is taken to ensure that the patient does not become cold during the procedure.

Another issue to be considered with anaesthetics and indeed any ‘stressful’ situation for a rabbit is ‘ileus’. This is when the gut stops moving and a painful build up of gas occurs. To prevent this, an injection to stimulate the gut is routinely given. Pain killers are also given to ensure the rabbit is comfortable and eating well as soon as possible.

You do not need to starve your rabbit prior to the anaesthetic as rabbits cannot be sick (this is a concern for cats, dogs and humans). In fact we encourage you to bring your rabbit’s usual food along with it to the surgery so that they continue to eat right up until they have their procedure. They also have something familiar to tuck into as soon as they have woken up from the anaesthetic.

What happens after the operation?

A warm and quiet bed is provided for your rabbit until he or she is awake enough to go home. We ask for rabbits to be kept somewhere warm and quiet for the first night back at home. You should keep an eye on how much your rabbit eats and drinks. High-fibre food, such as good quality hay and grass will stimulate the gut. Please make sure the bed is cleaned out before you put you rabbit back. This way you will be able to see if your rabbit has passed faeces. If your rabbit is not eating or does not produce normal quantities of faeces it may have ‘ileus’ or discomfort from the surgery. In this event, please contact Willows.

We expect that with the ‘hidden’ sutures and the pain killers we will have given, your rabbit should leave the wound alone. If too much attention is paid to this area it can result in wound infection. If this is a concern, a buster collar can be provided. However, these are not routinely used as they can increase the stress for the rabbit, which may result in ileus (see above).

We will normally re-examine the rabbit 2 days after surgery and occasionally a week later. If you have any concerns or queries at any time you should contact the surgery.

If you would like to discuss or arrange neutering of your rabbit, please do not hesitate to contact us.