

Cavy Health Care **By Mary Lou Eisel**

I cannot stress enough the importance of keeping your cavy healthy rather than treating an ill one. Cavies require at least one square foot each of living space. Ideal room temperature is 65-75F. Ideal humidity is 40-70%. Cavies are very sensitive to heat and should not be kept in direct sunlight. Cavies should be kept draft free. Cages need to be kept clean as well as water bottles and feed dishes. To avoid injury to legs, do not keep them on a wire floor esp babies with those tiny legs. Mice and rats can carry diseases that cavies can get so it is best not to keep them with your cavies. Some rabbit diseases also can be transmitted to cavies.

Cavy feed should have a protein level of 16-18 and a fiber level of 35%. Cavies do require **vitamin C** in their diet. Symptoms of vitamin C deficiency include hemorrhages (especially gums), malocclusion, joint swellings, and respiratory infections. Cavies with serious deficiency will hop in the hind end. Ensure you are feeding fresh cavy food with vitamin C added. You can supplement with vitamin C in the water and/or supply fresh veggies and fruits. In acute cases you can use human pediatric vitamin drops.

Lice and mites. Lice are easily visible with the eye. Best treatment is a cat flea powder. Mange mites burrow in the skin and cannot be seen with the eye. Best treatment is ivermectin or revolution. Fur mites adhere to the hair shafts and not readily killed with ivermectin or revolution. I find that the cat flea powder will kill them and a good bath a few days later will wash them off the hair shaft. It is wise to treat the entire herd 3 or 4 times a year as a preventative. If you attend a show where there are cavies that show signs of parasites it is recommended that the cavies who attended the show be dusted with flea powder before going back in the caviary.

Fungus eg ringworm. Not seen as often as lice and mites. The lesions are very typically round. Ointment for the treatment of human ringworm can be used. It has to be continued two weeks after all symptoms are gone.

Diarrhea – again prevention is the best approach. No sudden changes in feed, introduce fresh greens gradually, etc. One of the best treatments is good grass hay. Kaopectate can be used as well – about 1 cc for an adult and less for babies – twice daily.

Impaction is found in boars. It is easy to clean out as a rule, tough cases may require warm water compress and/or Vaseline to help soften.

Prolapsed penis – seldom seen. Needs to be washed with mild saline solution and returned to position. Some need some lubricant and/or topical antibiotic ointment.

Respiratory issues – mild cold can be treated with children's cold syrup (½ - 1cc twice daily). Pneumonia requires antibiotic treatment but never penicillin.

Kidney and bladder stones – a diet high in alfalfa is often associated with stones. Surgery is often the only way to remove.

Eyes – it is common in some breeds for the babies to develop irritation in the eyes from the hairs rubbing on the surface. The eyes need to be kept open and free from crustiness. A warm compress helps open the eyes. Severe cases can be treated with an ophthalmic ointment. A white milky discharge in the eyes is a natural occurrence and is completely normal.

Overgrown teeth – the front teeth can be trimmed easily but seldom is this seen. More common are overgrown rear molars. This requires trimming under sedation by a vet. It is hereditary and they will grow back in a matter of weeks.

Bumble foot is caused by bacteria. Prognosis is not always the best and the foot is often left deformed. The affected foot needs to be kept clean. Soaking in a mild saline solution is beneficial. Treat with topical antibiotic ointment.

Corns – horny growths on the feet. Not an issue to worry about.

Polydactyly – it is best to snip off those extra toes at birth as they can bleed badly if they tear as an adult. Since it is hereditary, I would not suggest putting those animals in the gene pool.

Nail care – neglected nails can be torn, they can twist around and grown into the skin.

Stress lumps are also caused by bacteria. Once open the abscess needs to be flushed with mild saline solution and treated with topical antibiotic ointment.

Wry neck – generally a symptom of inner ear infection or upper respiratory infection.

Urine scald – diaper rash ointment works wonderfully.

Pregnancy issues – most important is to wait to breed your sow when she is old enough and big enough. Sows must be a minimum of 4 months old and 1 ½ pounds. Also make sure that older sows are not too overweight before breeding – this is a major cause of pregnancy toxemia. Make sure that the sow's diet is not too high in sweet feed or calf manna in the last 3 weeks as this can lead to toxemia as well. A sow who is quivering is suffering from hypocalcemia. You can obtain liquid calcium (give 1cc orally) at the pharmacy or use Tums crushed on the food. Keep an eye on the udder of the sow. Swelling or redness can develop into mastitis. If caught early, warm compresses may help. Pregnancy alopecia can occur and resolves itself by the time the litter is of weaning age. Vaginal prolapses occur rarely – the tissues should be cleaned with a warm saline solution and restored. Full uterine prolapse is a very rare occurrence and very difficult to treat. I do not recommend rebreeding a sow after a vaginal prolapse.