

BATHING A RABBIT'S MESSY BOTTOM

If your rabbit has a messy bottom due to runny stool or urine leakage, the most important thing to do is to determine the source of the problem, starting with a full exam by your rabbit-experienced veterinarian. Be sure to ask for a full dental examination (including molars!) and blood chemistry and cell counts, if the vet deems it necessary.

A messy bottom is both uncomfortable and unsanitary. It encourages even worse problems, including scalding and even maggots. While your vet does detective work, it's up to you to keep the bunny comfortable. One way is with a careful, gentle "butt bath" to keep caustic bodily fluids away from the skin. There are two methods one can safely use to clean a messy bunny. Of the two, a DRY BATH is preferable. If the bunny is extremely soiled and very smelly, a wet bath may be necessary. Instructions for this procedure follow those of the Dry Bath. For either procedure, please use appropriate restraint and make sure your bunny's pelvis is supported at all times. For bottom bathing, we like to hold a bunny in an upright position, with her pelvis and bottom cradled in one hand, her spine against your chest, and the other hand gently holding her chest and pushing her back against your chest. If this sounds complicated, please ask us for a demonstration!

Dry Bath Procedure

1. Buy a container of baby cornstarch powder (DO NOT use baby powder or any sort of powder that contains talc, a carcinogenic respiratory irritant). Unscented or scented powders are fine. DO NOT use commercial bath or flea powders or other pesticides on your bunny. Use only baby-safe cornstarch powder for best, safest results.
2. Place the rabbit in a comfortable position so that the soiled areas are easily accessible. Cradling the rabbit on his or her back in your lap works well if the pet is calm. Use a clean towel for additional cushion.
3. Liberally apply the cornstarch to the soiled areas, and gently work the powder down into the fur, around any mess, and down to the skin.
4. Gently work the powder around any stubborn clumps of debris. As the cornstarch coats the mess, it will slide away easily.
5. Once the largest chunks have been removed, use a soft-tipped brush or flea comb to gently loosen any remaining soil.
6. Pat the powdered areas well to remove loose powder. Avoid getting too much near the rabbit's nose. The pet should be clean and fragrant in just a few minutes! Rabbits generally enjoy a dry bath and will sit quietly as the soothing powder takes away the sting of urine burn. If your rabbit's bottom is very messy, wet and smelly, it may be necessary to give his back end a wet bath. Here's how to do it:

Wet Bath Procedure

1. Purchase hypoallergenic, non-medicated pet shampoo from your veterinarian or pet supply store. Allergroom is a good choice, but any similar product will also

work. DO NOT USE ANY TYPE OF HUMAN SHAMPOO ON YOUR RABBIT. Rabbit skin is far more delicate and sensitive than human skin. Even baby shampoo is too harsh, and can make the problem worse rather than better.

2. Fill a bathroom sink with about 2.5 inches of lukewarm water.
3. Mix in about one tablespoon of shampoo and stir well.
4. Being firm and gentle so that the bunny cannot jump and injure himself, lower his bottom into the lukewarm shampoo water and gently lather the solution onto only the soiled areas until they are very clean. DO NOT wet the rabbit's entire body. If the bunny is very messy, you may have to change the water several times to do this.
5. Rinse with lukewarm, clear running water very thoroughly, leaving no shampoo residue.
6. Towel dry very carefully, being sure not to rub too hard against irritated skin.
7. Blow dry on low, keeping your hand close to the rabbit's skin so that you can tell if the air flow is too hot. The last thing you want to do is burn already inflamed skin!
8. When the rabbit is fluffy and dry, carefully clip away the fur on the areas where the skin is irritated. If you cannot see the skin, or are doubtful as to where the skin ends and fur begins, then *do not clip!* Rabbit skin is very thin and stretchy, and even a small wound can expand to alarming proportions!
9. Apply a thin layer of soothing balm, such as Calendula (from health food stores) or triple antibiotic ointment (avoid Neosporin "Plus," which contains lidocaine and is not recommended).
10. Repeat as necessary, but do not continue if the rabbit seems unduly stressed by the experience. Whenever you handle a rabbit, it is important to be firm, gentle and ready to release the bunny *at ground level* if he or she starts to struggle violently. As you probably know, one good kick can dislocate or even fracture the spine. Always keep the rabbit's safety first in mind if you attempt a bath!

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