

The JAMESON QUEEN ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Hand Feeding your Herbivore Friends

- Decrease in food intake in rabbits/guinea pigs is triggered by stress and/or illness and is common.
- Rabbits/guinea pigs must have food to heal and get better.
- Assist/Hand feeding is needed when the rabbit's appetite has decreased.
- Some rabbits/guinea pigs are easy to feed while others can be challenging or occasionally nearly impossible.
- It's scary your first time - you don't want to upset or hurt your vulnerable friend, but it's their most important "medicine."
- You can do it!

Equipment Needed for Assist Feeding

- Syringes: Experiment with larger or smaller syringes (see which is easier for you and your rabbit/guinea pig friend) ***Tip**: remember to "back fill" syringe, if you can suck up the critical care mixture in through the tip of the syringe it is too liquid
- Critical Care Powder: Mix with water to a porridge consistency in (+/- baby food/pumpkin in small amounts to add flavour)

Tip: If your friend is resisting the syringe, start with a small amount of baby food to spark their interest.

- We will let you know how much to feed depending on weight and whether your rabbit/guinea pig is eating anything on its own.
- These are the 4 common techniques used (pick one that feels the easiest for you and your bunny)
- First prepare the critical care and prefill your syringes. Pick a neutral spot to feed. Do not feed in your bunny's safe space.

Goals:

- Stop your rabbit from backing up
- Gently hold your rabbits head to avoid them from pulling away
- Find the rabbits mouth to gently insert the syringe
- Be sure to be safe and controlled

- First, create a "bunny burrito."

Centre your bunny on a spread-out towel and wrap like a "burrito", the towel should end up around the hind end and under the chin. Your index finger is placed under the animal's chin and your thumb is placed at the base of the skull. Your remaining fingers are placed on the animal's chest to prevent them from moving forward. Your forearm holds the rabbit/guinea pig securely against your body. The rabbit/guinea pig can be held on a table or placed on your lap. Hold their head in place gently (firm pressure is rarely needed) to prevent jerking away from the syringe.

1. Parallel Syringe Feeding (right hand version): Place the rabbit's/guinea pig's head to your right with its hind end to your left. Your right arm holds the rabbit/guinea pig against your body, while your left helps to prevent the rabbit/guinea pig from backing up. Your right hand holds their head. *Be aware that poking their nose or chin may cause them to flinch.* Your left thumb is used to help hold the rabbit's/guinea pig's head in place. The syringe should be placed between the front teeth (incisors) and back teeth (cheek teeth). Your left index finger is used to find their upper lip and helps to place the syringe into the mouth. Put the syringe approximately 2cm into the mouth pointing towards the back. Your rabbit/guinea pig should start gently chewing after each bit of food given. **(@ 2ml at a time)** Once they have chewed remove the syringe from their mouth to allow them to swallow.
2. Perpendicular: Place your rabbit/guinea pig on the towel or in your lap in a burrito facing away from you.
3. Between the Legs: Kneel on the ground with your knees apart and your ankles crossed. Place the rabbit/guinea pig between your knees with their rear towards your ankles and their head facing forward.
4. Less Restraint: Some rabbits/guinea pigs respond better to minimal restraint. Place them in a towel and hold them gently around their shoulders and offer the syringe and encourage them to grip the tip.

Some rabbits get through feeding quickly, while others can take 30-60 minutes; speed is determined by your rabbit

Remember to clean your rabbits face with a damp cloth after feeding time. Using a flea comb to brush their facial fur can help.

Additional Notes

- Always offer unlimited Timothy or Orchard grass hay, green leafy vegetables (at least three types) and possibly a small amount of pellets. Note: Animals with advanced dental disease or who refuse hay normally may need larger quantities of pellets.
- Monitor fecal output.
- Monitor weight.
- Gradually reduce feeding amounts as animal is starting to eat well and passing normal amounts of stool.
- If no feces are seen or rabbit/guinea pig doesn't start eating on its own within 2 days, recheck at the hospital as soon as possible.
- Volumes may appear large, however 15ml of critical care is equivalent to only 1 tablespoon of food.