# Recognizing and Controlling Pain in our Companion Rabbits

Rabbits are "prey" animals, (*prey* refers to an animal hunted and captured by a *predator* - so sad). Prey animals become immobile when frightened and/or in pain in order to hide from a predator. In this state, the rabbit might appear "calm". They may not even respond to touching painful areas of the body or the response may be so subtle it is almost undetectable. Rabbits have the same neurophysiological mechanisms as humans to produce pain and therefore have the same capacity to feel pain as humans. The first step for pain management in these beautiful, gentle creatures is to recognize the signs of pain.

The following are signs that have been associated with pain in the rabbit. Remember that not all these signs are SPECIFIC for pain and some may also occur with nonpainful conditions. However, all these signs are abnormal and should be cause for further investigation.

- sitting "hunched" up
- Alert but reluctant to move
- Loss or decrease food consumption or decreased fecal/stool production
- Teeth grinding
- Eyes partially closed when stimulating things around
- Limping
- Out of character aggressive behavior
- Hiding - loss of curiosity
- Crying or "grunting" when moving/defecating/urinating or being handled/ examined • Coat is unkempt due to loss of interest in grooming
- Taking a long time to eat and dropping food from mouth
- Eating only 1 type of food e.g. pellets only, stopped eating hay

If moderate or severe pain is not managed in a rabbit, then over time there are a number of serious and possibly life-threatening side effects that may develop. Commonly, gastrointestinal stasis/bloating which can then lead to a drop in body temperature, shock and organ damage.

*Analgesics* (pain control medication) should be used for any potentially painful procedure or disease condition even if no obvious signs of pain are apparent.

Leaving a rabbit in pain will delay healing and adversely affect their quality of life