

Mastitis in Cavies

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Mastitis is one of those things that you may never see in your caviary, but it's a good thing to know about and to know how to treat. Most cases of mastitis are responsive to therapy if you catch them early enough and manage them appropriately.

Common organisms causing mastitis are strep, staph and *E. coli*. Conditions that are wet and unsanitary may allow the teat to come into greater numbers of unsavory organisms. This means your nursing sows need to be kept in clean quarters- not only for her benefit, but for the litter as well. Other predisposing factors to mastitis are large litter size and pups who are constantly, aggressively nursing- never giving the sow (and her mammary glands and teats) any down time. You may look at the sow's nipples and see the ends turning reddish purple from trauma due to the nursing pups. They may very well have a chapped appearance. This is an appropriate time to step in. These sows can be pulled from the litter for a little bit of rest and returned to the pups as her mammary glands get full. At this point, these sows really don't need any antibiotic therapy, they simply need time to heal. If the trauma progresses, you may see a hot angry teat with an accompanying red, swollen mammary gland. Often the sow will be reluctant to walk because that mammary gland is very painful and honestly, that may be the first sign you may see that anything wrong at all. You may think she has a limp due to some injury when in fact it is due to the pain of the mastitis.

There is diverse opinion as to the best approach in managing these sows (meaning my opinion diverges from conventional wisdom). Some folks advocate weaning the litter absolutely and totally once the sow has mastitis. I believe this is not the best approach and here is my logic. If you have an infection going on in any tissue, especially a tissue that has an opening already to the outside, the best possible thing for that infection is to allow it to drain. The pups are doing the sow a favor in effectively evacuating the infected gland. What cannot be allowed to continue is for the sow to have unrelenting pups on her 24/7. Pups are given access to the sow several times a day to allow the milk to be drained from the mammary glands, but they are not given so much time that additional trauma occurs to the teats. Don't worry that the infected milk will be harmful to the pups, it will not be- they were drinking it before you had any idea that the sow had mastitis and I can find no reference to suggest that it is harmful to the pups. So, at least in my caviary, I modulate the practice of absolute and abrupt weaning. You handle it as works out best for you. These sows will dry up (but slowly without engorgement) because with a partial/stepdown weaning of the pups, there is less stimulus to make milk.

Antibiotics are appropriate when you see a hot, painful mammary gland. The one most commonly used is Trimethoprim/Sulfa and the dose is 15-30mg/kg twice a day orally. Most of the sows will respond quite well. Sometimes, however, the sow is left with lasting effects from the bout of mastitis. She may have shortened or non-existent teats; they have basically been sucked right off her. The teats may heal so that there is no longer a central canal with an opening to the outside- essentially a blind nipple. She

may develop an abscess that ruptures out the side of the mammary gland, so when it heals leaves behind a non-functioning gland, or in some cases, the infection can be so severe and overwhelming that the sow dies. The reproductive future of this animal depends upon the extent of damage the mastitis has caused. It may mean no change in her future breeding potential and it can certainly go all the way up to retiring her from the breeding population in your caviary. You cannot always prevent chapped nipples/mastitis in your sows. The real key to management is early discovery that anything is going wrong and taking appropriate action at that time.

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