

Dental disease in pet rabbits in the UK

Rabbit teeth are open-rooted and grow continuously throughout life. Eating a fibrous diet such as grass and hay is important to help rabbit teeth to wear down naturally and avoid overgrowth.



Sadly however, dental disease is a major welfare concern for pet rabbits. Overgrown teeth can lead to severe pain, weight loss and behavioural changes.

Study population: 161,979 rabbits in VetCompass in 2019

A random sample of 2,219 confirmed cases of dental disease were studied in greater detail

This study aimed to identify the frequency of veterinary diagnosis of dental disease in companion rabbits under UK primary veterinary care in 2019, and to identify whether head shape and body type contributed to increased risk.

Frequency of dental disease

Proportion of rabbits with dental disease affecting either front or back teeth: **15.36%**

Proportion of rabbits with dental disease affecting front teeth: **3.14%**

Proportion of rabbits with dental disease affecting back teeth: **13.72%**

Were head shape and body type linked with dental disease risk?



Lop-eared rabbits did not have a higher risk of dental disease than erect-eared rabbits

Brachycephalic (flat-faced) rabbits did not have a higher risk of dental disease than normocephalic (longer-faced) rabbits



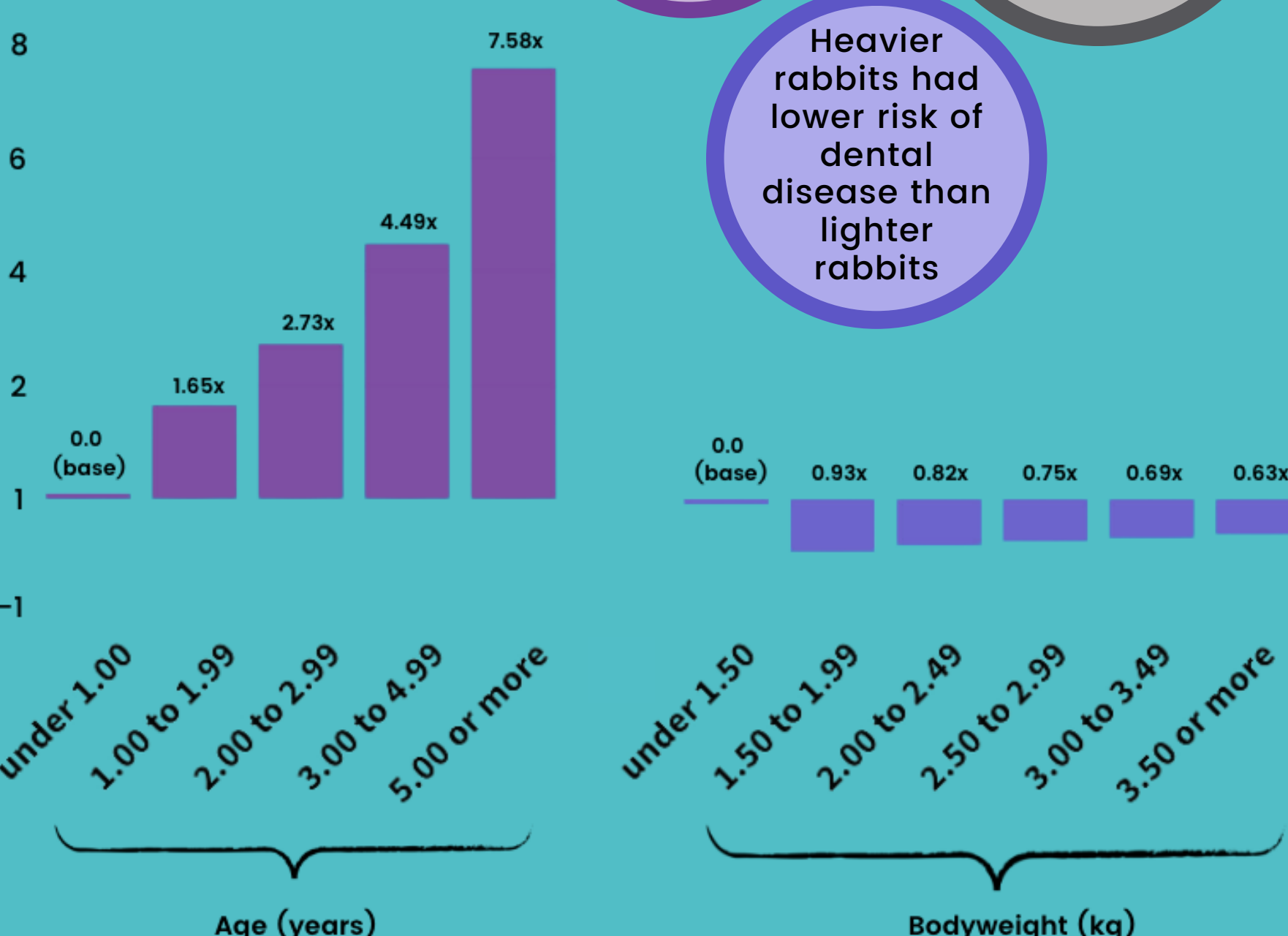
Dwarf rabbits did not have a higher risk of dental disease than 'standard' sized rabbits

Other risk factors for dental disease

As rabbits aged, their risk of dental disease rose substantially

Male rabbits were 1.23 times more likely to have dental disease than female rabbits

Heavier rabbits had lower risk of dental disease than lighter rabbits



Conclusions

Dental disease is very common in rabbits. Owners should look out for subtle signs, e.g., selective eating, avoiding hay, and drooling.

All pet rabbits should receive frequent veterinary dental examinations, irrespective of breed or head and body type.

Dietary factors may play a more important role in the development of dental disease than head shape. Owners should make sure their rabbit's diet comprises of at least 85% hay.

[CLICK TO READ THE FULL STUDY](#)

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RVC VetCompass <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass> carries out welfare research based on anonymised clinical information shared from over 30% of UK veterinary practices. We are very grateful to the owners and veterinary professionals who contribute to VetCompass research.