



Blood sample procedures in the rabbit patient

Equipment required:

- *Clippers*
- *Emla cream®/Local anaesthetic*
- *Surgical spirit and swabs*
- *Needle (or Butterfly catheter) and syringe*
- *Sudacrem® (and possible swab and tape for a pressure bandage)*



TECHNIQUES & SITES

Saphenous; Position = Partial lateral recumbancy.

1. Rabbits don't like to be forced on their side and will fight it and risk damaging their backs so their head and chest should be kept in Sternal recumbancy



2. The pelvis should be held so that the palm of the handler's hand is over the caudal spine with fingers facing directed vertically towards the table and then very gently manipulate the pelvis while rotating the hand so that the hind limbs slide away from the handler's position. Do not lift the pelvis up too much as this will be uncomfortable and panic the rabbit



3. The thumb should now be in front of the rabbit's stifle and pressure applied here will gently extend the limb, while the other fingers can gently raise the vein by applying pressure to the caudal aspect of the leg.

4. The vein should be clearly felt proximal to the tibia (sometimes slightly caudal), which will indicate where to either clip the hair and apply local anaesthetic or wet down the hair with surgical spirit prior to venepuncture.

* It is recommended to apply Emla cream® or local anaesthetic to both legs 15-40 minutes prior to venepuncture due to the discomfort and the high risk of kicking and the resulting haematomas *.



5. Venepuncture can be by either needle and syringe or butterfly catheter (27G/23G) and syringe. The latter is preferred (by the author) as it allows flexibility if the rabbit does move its leg without jeopardising the blood collection, also the capillary action of the catheter tubing offers instant confirmation of successful puncture and 0.3-0.5ml of blood can be collected from this tube if not discarded after withdrawal from the vein.

6. On exiting the vein the site MUST have firm, uninterrupted pressure put on it for at least 1 minute due to the Saphenous being a larger vessel and more likely to blow (haematomas)!! Often a small temporary pressure bandage can be used once the spirit is wiped off as this can irritate thin rabbit skin.

Cephalic; Position = Sternal and possibly using 'Bunny-burrito' technique.

1. Rabbits don't generally like to have their forelimbs extended so wrapping it up in a towel ('bunny burrito') can help secure the body while gently extending a front limb slightly. This procedure is much the same for placing a catheter.



2. Clipping the hair and applying Emla cream or local anaesthetic is strongly advised to avoid movement during venepuncture.

* If 'cut-down' techniques is used the leg must be dressed and bandaged to protect the wound from contamination *

Jugular; Sternal using 'Bunny-burrito' technique.

1. The rabbit can be wrapped up in a towel ('bunny burrito') and brought to the edge of the table/surface. The handler can then 'hug' the rabbit securely against the table and gently turn up the head to allow access under the chin.



2. The hair should be clipped and Emla cream or local anaesthetic is strongly advised, but the procedure is much the same as that done with an anxious cat.

3. The vein is raised by putting pressure cranial and slightly medial to the shoulder blade, and the jugular should be palpated or viewed especially when the pressure is released and reapplied. Slight tension to the skin could help to reduce the vein's mobility, but care not to flatten it.

4. 'Unblunted' needles sized 25G to 27G will work best and the vein is often more superficial than it appears!

5. Firm pressure should be applied immediately following removal of the needle, and the rabbit's head allowed to relax into a natural position.