

## Understanding the Third Most Popular Pet – Is He Happy?

Much different to read than cats and dogs, these affectionate pets have their own body language to let you know when they are content and when they are feeling out of sorts, or afraid, stressed or anxious. Your ability to bond with this pet depends largely on your ability to understand him.

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### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Your bond with your bunny depends largely on your ability to understand your pet
- Understanding rabbit body language, which can be subtle, can also help you spot abnormal behaviors that may signal your pet is sick and needs to see a veterinarian
- Your rabbit is likely happy if her ears are close together, facing backward and pointing outward
- A happy rabbit may also hop in the air, removing all four paws from the ground, and do a mid-air twist, known as a binky
- Boxing is one of the most recognizable signs that your rabbit is feeling upset, stressed out and aggressive
- A rabbit in a crouched position with its head near the ground and ears flattened against its back is likely anxious or fearful

Rabbits are the third most popular pet in the U.S., after cats and dogs.<sup>1</sup> They can be affectionate, playful and curious, yet your bond with your bunny depends largely on your ability to understand your pet.

Knowing when your rabbit is feeling afraid, stressed or anxious allows you to provide a safe space for her to unwind and calm down. On the other hand, recognizing signs that your rabbit is happy and content helps you support her well-being, and look for opportunities for positive interaction.

Understanding rabbit body language, which can be subtle, can also help you spot abnormal behaviors that may signal your pet is sick and needs to see a veterinarian who has experience with rabbits. Here are some common bunny positions to watch for and what they likely mean.

### Signs Your Bunny Is Happy and Relaxed

Your rabbit is likely happy if her ears are close together, facing backward and pointing outward. She may be lying down, relaxed, in a “loaf” position, with her legs tucked under her body. Another relaxed position is lying down with front and back legs fully extended, in a sprawled-out position.

A rabbit may also hop in the air, removing all four paws from the ground, and do a mid-air twist.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes known as a binky, this signature rabbit move is a sign of a very happy bunny. According to Amy, AKA The Bunny Lady:<sup>3</sup>

*"A binky is literally a jump for joy. Your rabbit is just too happy to stand in one place. Often times, binkies will be accompanied by high-speed zooming around the room. Your rabbit is so happy and just cannot contain all the energy they have.*

*When your rabbit isn't feeling quite as high energy, they may perform what I call a 'mini binky.' This looks like the start of a binky, but the rabbit never comes all the way off the ground. In the end, only their head does a little happy twist."*

If your rabbit runs in circles around your feet, it's also a sign of happy excitement and affection.<sup>4</sup> Other signs your bunny is happy, relaxed and possibly feeling affectionate include:<sup>5</sup>

- Nudging your hand or foot for attention
- Licking you or another rabbit
- Grooming themselves or another rabbit
- Lightly chattering or vibrating their teeth, which is similar to purring in cats
- Batting toys around

## **Signs Your Bunny Is Unhappy or Stressed**

Boxing is one of the most recognizable signs that your rabbit is feeling upset, stressed out and aggressive. It describes a rabbit standing on its hind legs and swatting at people or pets that come near.

"This is an aggressive rabbit behavior. Most of the time, rabbits would prefer to run and hide instead of fight, but you might come across a stubborn rabbit who chooses to stand their ground. I see this often in videos where people introduce their pet rabbit to their dog. It might look like the rabbit is being cute, but in reality they are very upset and ready to fight," The Bunny Lady explains.<sup>6</sup>

A rabbit in a crouched position with its head near the ground and ears flattened against its back is also likely anxious or fearful. If your bunny is hiding, she's likely fearful or could be in pain. Other signs of fear, aggression or unhappiness in bunnies include:<sup>7</sup>

- Lunging in combination with biting and grunting
- Thumping its back legs, which is a warning sign of danger to other rabbits
- A hunched posture, with a very curved back, could be a sign of pain
- Flicking its feet as it hops away
- Ear shaking is a sign of displeasure or could also signal an ear infection

## **Curious Bunny Behaviors**

You may be perplexed by certain behaviors your rabbit does regularly, such as rubbing her chin on you. This is a way of marking her territory. If your rabbit stands on its hind legs and periscopes her head around, it means she's curious and investigating her surroundings. Other less desirable behaviors, like spraying urine, scattering poop and mounting

other rabbits, are signs of dominance and territory marking.<sup>8</sup>

Rabbits also have teeth that grow continuously. So if you're wondering why your rabbit likes to chew, this is why. The area where your rabbit roams will need to be bunny-proofed thoroughly as a result, since bunnies will chew on electrical cords, plants and other dangerous items if they can reach them.

As burrowing animals, rabbits also enjoy digging, so you may spot your bunny trying to dig up your carpet. Be sure she isn't ingesting any carpet fibers, which could be dangerous. Instead, provide her with a plastic tub or cardboard box filled with newspapers to dig through safely.<sup>9</sup>

If you do something to upset your rabbit, even unintentionally, like trim their nails, she might even let you know it by giving you the "cold shoulder," or actually sitting with their backside facing you.

"My old bunny, Tenshi, used to do this to me all the time, especially when I had to give her medication every day for her arthritis," The Bunny Lady says. "She would grumpily put her back to me and hop away if I tried to pet her. She would even refuse to take treats from me for a couple hours, to really make sure I knew how upset she was."<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately, your bunny probably won't hold a grudge for long. She continues, "They'll eventually come around and forgive you. Just be patient and give them their space for a little while."<sup>11</sup>

## Sources and References

<sup>1</sup> [Discover October 1, 2020](#)

<sup>2</sup> [RSPCA, Understanding Rabbit Behavior](#)

<sup>3, 4, 6, 10, 11</sup> [Bunny Lady, Rabbit Body Language](#)

<sup>5, 7, 8, 9</sup> [PetMD, What Do Different Bunny Positions Mean? October 27, 2022](#)

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