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Clinical Technique

Airway Management In The Rabbit

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Abstract

A key factor when establishing a general anaesthetic protocol is proper airway management. Due to its unique anatomy, the rabbit presents the anesthetist with several challenges regarding airway management. Methods for managing a rabbit patient's airway along with the potential advantages and complications associated with these described techniques, is the focus of this clinical review.

***Key Words:* Rabbit; intubation; airway; supraglottic device; v-gel; nasotracheal intubation**

Airway management is required during sedation and anesthesia in order to maintain a patent airway for oxygen delivery to the lungs and to facilitate ventilation of carbon dioxide. In critical cases, airway management may be necessary to enable cardiopulmonary resuscitation and ventilation.

Laryngeal and tracheal trauma have both been reported in rabbits following or attempting endotracheal intubation.^{1,2} The adverse complications associated with rabbit intubation is likely to increase for health care providers that are inexperienced with this procedure. The risk associated with intubation should be considered as part of a balanced airway management protocol, therefore alternative options should be available including injectable anesthesia, masks, nasal intubation, or a supraglottic airway device. Appropriate airway management includes protection of the airway from desiccation, irritation, and excess discharges.

ANATOMY

There are several anatomic issues that make airway management a challenge in the rabbit. The open mouth does not allow for clear visualisation of the glottis.

Identifying the rabbit glottis without additional instrumentation, in most cases, is not possible. The oral cavity is long and narrow while the fleshy base of the tongue (or 'torus') fills the back of the throat, further impeding visualisation. As near obligate nasal breathers, the rabbits glottis should normally be engaged with the soft palate, consequently, in normal circumstances, the soft-palate will have to be 'flipped' off of the epiglottis to visualize this anatomic structure. The diameter of the rabbit trachea

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