

# Hare-raising therapy helps bunny stay mobile

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At NC State, underwater treadmills aren't just for humans undergoing physical therapy. They're also proving useful for treating hares – as in rabbits – suffering from degenerative illnesses.

Meet Edie, a five-year-old Belgian hare (which is a breed of domestic rabbit, not an actual hare) who came to NC State's exotic animal service and was diagnosed with a progressive spinal disease that affects her rear legs.

Edie first started showing symptoms of the degenerative disease last October. As the disease progressed, Edie became unable to control the movements of her back legs. By the end of the year, the condition seemed to have plateaued, leading NC State veterinarians to recommend physical [therapy](#) to preserve her mobility as much as possible.

Cory Sims, clinical veterinarian and rehabilitation specialist, uses a variety of tools to help Edie: time on the underwater treadmill, which slows movement and allows Edie to focus on where her legs are and how to keep them in position; stretching on the "therapy peanut," a rubber exercise ball that encourages balance and strengthens the core; and finally a cart that will keep Edie upright so that she can practice balancing on her [hind legs](#).

"Edie's condition is chronic – we can't make her back into the bunny she was," Sims says. "But what we can do is support her as long as possible so that she maintains mobility over a longer period. It's about promoting the quality of life."

As exotic pets become more popular, the range of therapies available to these animals has increased. Rehabilitation and therapy are still fairly new and unique services for exotics, according to Vanessa Grunkemeyer, assistant professor of exotic medicine with NC State's exotic animal service. But the benefits of these new services go beyond helping pets like Edie.

"We provide primary medical care and [emergency care](#) for [exotic animals](#)," Grunkemeyer says, "but part of our job as veterinary scientists involves doing research, which helps us learn more about these species, improve their treatment options and educate the next generation of veterinarians."

Provided by North Carolina State University

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