



# Pet Care Advice

## Caring for your Rabbit

### Feeding

**Feeding the correct diet is the most important aspect of rabbit care.**

It has become increasingly popular for pet rabbits to be fed commercial 'muesli' type foods. Many rabbit experts now recommend avoiding this type of food completely as there is evidence to show that it can lead to selective feeding.

This selective feeding can cause problems:

**Soft Bones** from lack of calcium. This can lead to overgrown teeth and tooth roots which produce abscesses causing weeping eyes, and spine or limb fractures and / or back pain.

**Lack of Fibre** leading to digestive problems and tooth overgrowth

**Diarrhoea** caused by the high starch content of dry foods which the digestive systems of rabbits cannot cope with. This can attract flies in summer leading to infection, or even life threatening enterotoxaemia

**Obesity** Overweight rabbits cannot clean themselves properly and the build-up of faeces around their tail attracts flies. These lay eggs on your rabbit which hatch into maggots. This is known as 'Flystrike' and requires prompt veterinary treatment. 'Rear Guard' may help prevent future occurrences until your rabbit loses weight.

**Always consult a vet if your rabbit appears to have diarrhoea or a permanently dirty rear end.**

### **What should I feed my rabbit?**

**Grass and Hay** contain all the necessary nutrients for rabbit health. They also provide fibre to aid digestion. As in the wild, your rabbit will need to eat a lot to satisfy its energy requirements. This increased chewing results in healthier teeth and reduces boredom in pet rabbits. Alfalfa can be fed to rabbits at an early stage.

**Greens** such as **Cabbage, Broccoli, Dandelions, Docks, Spring greens, Leafy topped Carrots, Celery, and Herbs** provide variety in the diet. Fresh vegetables should make up 10% of their diet.

**Spinach** and **Kale** may be fed in moderation but not every day, ideally 1-3 meals a week is recommended as they may cause bladder stones. Other occasional treats are **Green Peppers, Dark Green Salad Leaves, Tomatoes** and **Apples**.

**Avoid** peas, beans and sweetcorn and nuts due to their high starch content and treats such as biscuits, bread or toast, treat sticks, sugary foods and chocolate drops are also poisonous .

Pelleted food is appropriate as a supplement feed especially for growing, breeding or thin rabbits. Pellets should be fed sparingly, only 1-2 tablespoons per day is recommended. We recommend **Burgess 'Supa Rabbit Excel'**. It is in pellet form which ensures your rabbit cannot pick and choose and gives you confidence that a balanced diet is being provided.

### **Weight Loss for Rabbits**

Rabbits need to eat frequently and starving them can upset their health and can cause hepatic lipidosis. Changing to a healthy diet of mostly hay will help them lose weight gradually. Allow your rabbit plenty of exercise, at least 4 hours daily and the weight will come off naturally.

**We provide FREE weight advice and weight check appointments for rabbits.**

### **Changing to a Healthy Diet**

Gradually reduce the dry food over a couple of weeks and introduce some greens. Some rabbits are not keen to eat a different food or may get mild stomach upsets. By introducing new foods slowly, you can identify any that cause a problem. Make changes over 14-28 days and monitor your rabbit for any problems, ideally check their weight if possible. Burgess Excel Overweight Adult nuggets can be also be used.



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## Vaccination

### Myxomatosis

A disease common in wild rabbit populations locally. It is transmitted by bites from fleas and flying insects, being easily transferred between animals. The infection causes skin swellings, respiratory disease and is usually fatal. This disease can affect house rabbits too, as your rabbit does not have to come into contact with other rabbits to be at risk.

### Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)

A condition which causes rapid internal bleeding, convulsions and sudden death. A combined vaccination against both diseases is recommended with a single injection from 5 weeks of age.

## Boosters

To maintain immunity against these diseases we recommend an annual booster vaccination. This can be given with one injection. As part of our vaccination programme we will send you an annual reminder when your rabbit is due for a booster.

**We complete a full health check at each visit and provide FREE advice on all aspects of rabbit care.**

## Housing

Rabbits need lots of space to allow adequate exercise for muscle and bone health. It also makes them less nervous and consequently less likely to become aggressive. They are quite tolerant to cold as long as they have a dry sheltered environment and plenty of warm bedding material, such as hay and straw. Waste should be disposed of regularly as the fumes from soiled bedding can encourage rabbits to develop pneumonia. Sunlight is important as it promotes Vitamin D production which helps to maintain a correct calcium balance. However, shade must be easily available to prevent overheating. Hutches should be a minimum of 10ft x 6ft x 3ft.

## 'House' Rabbits

House rabbits are becoming increasingly popular. Rabbits adapt well to being kept indoors as they are extremely social pets and can be easily trained to use a litter tray. Care must be taken to combat destructive chewing behaviour. Rabbit-proofing furniture and electric cables before introducing a rabbit is advisable! Tunnels, toys, digging trays should be provided.

## Keeping Rabbits Together

Rabbits live in small groups in the wild, so pet rabbits can become lonely and bored if kept alone. Ideally rabbits should be kept in pairs. Rabbits are generally happy together provided they have plenty of space. Care should be taken when introducing a new rabbit to a group or individual. Rabbits are more likely to get along well if they have been neutered as it reduces aggressive mating behaviour as well as preventing unwanted litters.

## Rabbits and Guinea Pigs

It is not generally recommended to house guinea pigs with rabbits, as the two species have very different nutritional requirements. Rabbits can inflict severe injuries on guinea pigs, and can make them very unhappy through bullying.

## Senior Rabbits

Burgess Excel Mature tasty nuggets are recommended and aids joint stiffness, energy levels and helps keep weight under control. It is recommended to feed from 5yrs+, offering Alfalfa can be useful due to its high energy levels and cutting up vegetables into small pieces can be helpful if they have teeth problems.

## Neutering

Neutering of rabbits is recommended to reduce aggression, urine marking, and mating behaviour. In female rabbits, spaying will prevent uterine cancer and uterine infections later in life, as well as unwanted litters. We recommend spaying **female** rabbits at **5-6 months** of age. **Male** rabbits are castrated routinely at **4-5 months** of age, or when the testes are of a reasonable size.

## Insurance

It is now possible to insure your pet rabbit for veterinary treatment in the same way as you would a dog or cat. This is particularly recommended for 'house' rabbits and for breeds which are prone to particular health problems.

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