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CARING FOR YOUR PET RABBIT

Diet

Fibre is essential for rabbits. **Good quality hay and/or grass** should make up most of a rabbit's diet (about 85% of what your rabbit eats) and should be available all the time. This is key to preventing dental problems, as a rabbit's molars must be kept worn by chewing, and to keep the gut functioning properly.

Rabbits can also be fed some quantities of washed **green leafy vegetables** e.g. broccoli, spring greens and parsley (about 10-15% of what your rabbit eats). Rabbits are also very partial to dandelion leaves from the garden! A very small quantity of concentrated food (1-2% of what your rabbit eats) can also be offered to your rabbit, but this is best reserved to offer as a treat. Muesli-style rabbit foods are not advisable as the rabbit will selectively eat certain bits resulting in an unhealthy diet. Good quality pellet style foods are preferable. Carrots and apples should only be occasional treats.

Rabbits normally pass two types of stools - round, hard droppings that you see in the hutch and sticky droppings called caecotrophs. Rabbits normally re-eat the caecotrophs directly from their bottoms, so finding caecotrophs in the hutch or stuck to your rabbit can be a sign of poor health, and you should book an appointment with the vet.

Fresh water should always be available.

If your rabbit ever shows signs of going off their food or has a reduction in the amount of stool being passed, they need to be assessed by a vet quickly. Gut stasis is a medical emergency and a rabbit who has not eaten for as little as 10 hours must see a vet asap.

Environment

A hutch is not enough! It is recommended by the Rabbit Welfare association that a 6ft x 2ft x 2ft hutch is needed, with an 8ft run attached. This is to allow enrichment and the rabbits to fulfil natural behaviours. There should be areas of shade, places to hide and a place dedicated to digging (use child-friendly sand, or earth).

Company

Rabbits are social creatures and should live in pairs or groups. Rabbits should **not** be kept with Guinea Pig as companions; they are two different species that originate from totally different parts of the world. A good combination is a neutered male and a neutered female that have been brought up together. When introducing a pair of rabbits, the bonding process should be taken VERY slowly. You should start by placing them next to each other and doing very short introductions over a period until they seem comfortable with each other and no aggression is shown from either rabbit.

Neutering

Neutering is extremely important as it prevents unwanted pregnancies, can reduce fighting, and in females prevents uterine cancer, which can affect up to 80% of individuals. We can neuter rabbits from 3-4 months old.

Vaccinations

Rabbits should be vaccinated against **Myxomatosis**. This is a frequently fatal disease caused by a virus, which is common amongst the wild rabbit population. It is spread by biting insects and can affect both indoor and outdoor pet bunnies.

Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (RVHD) is a frequently fatal viral disease. There are two strains in the UK, RVHD-1 and RVHD-2.

Until recently we vaccinated against myxomatosis and both strains of RVHD with one visit and one injection. Vaccination is given from 5 weeks of age, with an annual booster and health check then advised. Following the appearance of a new highly virulent strain of RVHD in Europe the latest advice from the Rabbit Welfare and Fund is to add in an extra vaccination, given at least two weeks apart from the main vaccine (<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rvhd2-hv-faq-april-2025/>). As of June 2025, we have stock of this new vaccine and can take bookings if you want to 'top up'; our team can advise further.

Flystrike (maggots)

Sadly, this is a common problem, however generally speaking flystrike is not a disease of a healthy rabbit. Flystrike can occur when the rabbit's rear end becomes soiled with stools and/or urine. This attracts flies which lay eggs on damaged skin or on the soiled fur. These eggs then hatch into maggots that eat away at the tissues in the surrounding area and release toxins which makes the rabbit unwell. It can be fatal.

Your rabbit should be carefully checked at least twice a day. If you spot any signs of flystrike on your pet, such as eggs or maggots, seek urgent advice from us.

You can prevent flystrike by:

- Keeping the hutch clean and dry.
- Feeding the correct high fibre diet (see above).
- Keeping your rabbits active - obese rabbits may be too big to clean themselves effectively or to eat their caecotrophs leading to soiling that attracts the flies.
- Checking your rabbit(s) frequently to make sure they remain healthy.
- Using suitable insecticides and insect repellents – speak to us for more information.