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## CARING FOR YOUR PET RABBIT

### Diet

Fibre is essential for rabbits. **Good quality hay and/or grass** should make up the vast majority 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. cabbage, broccoli and kale (about 10-15% of what your rabbit eats). A very small quantity of concentrate 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 stool - 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 be available at all times.

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. A rabbit that does not eat for as little as 10 hours can be a medical emergency.

### Environment

A hutch should be provided for your rabbit to rest in, with sleeping areas for each rabbit. This should be big enough to allow the rabbits to stretch out and do at least 3 hops (not steps), and tall enough for them to sit and stand without their ears touching the top. Along with a hutch rabbits need plenty of space to run around in, which is usually provided in a run attached to the hutch. They should be able to stand in the run without their ears touching the top. There should be areas of shade, places to hide and a place dedicated to digging (use child-friendly sand, or earth).

For more information check out the Rabbit Welfare and Fund [website](#).

### 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.

Neutering is 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. Vaccination is given from 5 weeks of age, with an annual booster and health check then advised.

**Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (RVHD)** is a frequently fatal viral disease. Protection against one strain (RVHD-1) is included at the same time as the myxomatosis vaccination. There is now another strain of RVHD in the UK, RVHD-2, which we can vaccinate against from 10 weeks of age. Currently this vaccine may be given at least 2 weeks apart from the myxomatosis booster.

## **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.