



My Pets Vets Information for Rabbit Owners

Rabbits make wonderful pets, and as a responsible pet owner you'll want your bunnies to enjoy a happy, healthy life.

Housing

Rabbits need space, exercise and stimulation, they need to run, jump and dig and have shelter from the elements and from any vermin or predators, whether you choose to house them indoors or out you must provide for these needs.

Outdoor rabbits should ideally have 8 hours exercise a day either in a large run (8ft x 4ft x 4ft minimum), or in a garden, when it comes to both hutch and run size, bigger is always better. Remember a hutch is not enough.

Indoor rabbits can be litter trained, and make great house pets. You do need to bunny proof any wires or anything that could harm your rabbit as they like to chew.

Cleaning your rabbits home

It is essential that you clean your rabbits home regularly. All rabbits can be litter trained which makes cleaning them out so much easier. Most rabbits will only soil one area of their living quarters, and this area needs cleaning out at least once daily, and the remainder of their living quarters needs cleaning out at least twice weekly, although the whole area needs checking daily. During the summer months it is necessary to pay particular attention to your rabbits living quarters, and to prevent them being attractive to flies.

Health Checks

You should check your rabbit daily, and twice daily during the summer months, paying particular attention to the vent area to ensure there is no soiling. It's important to make sure that your rabbit is eating, and producing pellets daily, if they stop doing either of these two things, or if their pellets change in shape, size or number, you must contact a vet immediately.

Companionship

Rabbits have evolved to live in groups, never alone. Keeping a single rabbit deprives your rabbit of one of their most fundamental requirements, company of other rabbits. It is possible to keep just one rabbit if your bunny lives indoors as part of the family with plenty of human company, but they would always prefer to have a bunny friend. Rabbits that have formed a bonded pair will groom each other, lie down together and eat together. Once you have seen a bonded pair together it is unlikely you will ever want to keep a single rabbit again.

It is popular opinion that rabbits and guinea pigs make ideal cage mates, but this is not true. Some pairs do get on well but it is more common for injuries to occur to one or both parties.

Please ask us if you require more information on introducing a new rabbit to your bunny, do not just introduce a new rabbit to your pet and expect them to get on.

Feeding

Many common health problems in pet rabbits are caused by incorrect feeding. A healthy diet for a pet rabbit should mimic the diet of its wild counterparts.

Water – It's essential rabbits have access to clean, fresh water daily. Some rabbits prefer to drink from bottles, some from bowls, allow your rabbit to choose which it prefers, or ideally provide water in both forms.

Grass - Rabbits are designed to eat grass. The most natural life for a pet rabbit would be to run loose in the garden, grazing on the lawn, eating a wide variety of plants, vegetables and bark from trees.

Hay - We advise unlimited access to good quality hay which meets rabbits basic nutritional requirements and has many other benefits. Hay should always be fed to rabbits eating 'complete' rabbit foods. Hay keeps your rabbits busy, reducing boredom and preventing behavioural problems, as well as strengthening teeth and jaws and maintaining healthy gut movement

Vegetables - We believe that rabbits should be allowed to eat vegetables daily, the following is a list of safe vegetables for your rabbit

Asparagus, Basil, Broccoli, Brussel Sprouts, Cabbage, Carrot tops, Cauliflower leaves and stalks, Celery, Chicory Greens, Coriander, Cucumber, Dill, Endive, Fennel, Green Pepper, Kale, Mint, Oregano, Parsley, Red Leaf Lettuce, Red Cabbage, Romaine Lettuce, Savoy Cabbage, Spinach, Turnip Greens, Watercress, Spring Greens

Healthy treats - we all love treats and so do our rabbits. We recommend you avoid high calorie treats as they can lead to obesity and tooth decay as they do in us, but even more importantly they can cause serious problems with the natural bacteria found in a rabbits gut which can lead to fatal digestive upsets.

Healthy treats include: Broccoli, herbs, occasional small amounts of fruit such as apple, occasional small amounts of vegetables such as carrots

Remember wild rabbits do not climb trees to eat fruit, or dig deep into the ground for food, so wild rabbits would only eat windfall fruit and the occasional carrot - although they do love carrot tops!

Complete foods - Complete foods provide your rabbit with all the nutrients they require, but they do not provide all the other benefits hay provides. A pelleted complete food provides the most balanced feed possible.

How much to feed? - We recommend you allow unlimited access to good quality hay daily for your rabbit to graze on. Rabbits should be given a small amount of complete food a day (roughly the size of your rabbits head), along with dark green leafy vegetables.

Coprophagy - rabbits eat some of their own droppings, along with the food you provide. The hard dry rabbit raisins that you find in your rabbits environment are their waste products, but they also produce dark, shiny, smelly pellets called caecotrophs which are normally eaten directly from the anus, you will only see them occasionally. If you suddenly start seeing lots of these caecotrophs then we need to look for a reason so please contact us for advise.

Poisonous Plants and Flowers - some plants and flowers are poisonous to rabbits, below is a list of the most common ones:

Autumn Crocus, Begonia, Black Nightshade, Busy Lizzie, Buttercups, Carnation, Chrysanthemum, Clematis, Cowslips, Geranium, Hemlock, Laburnum, Laurel, Poison Ivy, Poppy Yucca, Potato and Potato Tops, Rhubarb and Leaves, Tomato Leaves

It is very important to be aware of what your rabbit is eating every day, and to ensure that they are producing pellets daily. If you notice a change in the amount of food your rabbit is consuming, or the pellets they are producing please contact the surgery as a matter of urgency.

Vaccinations

Rabbits should be vaccinated yearly against Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic disease 1 and 2, which are viral diseases widespread in wild rabbits in the UK and are likely to prove fatal to unvaccinated bunnies. There is no effective treatment for these diseases which are spread between rabbits, the environment, and via biting insects such as fleas and flies.

We vaccinate rabbits from 5 weeks of age once, or twice a year depending on the disease threat in our area.

Neutering

We recommend that you neuter your rabbit, there are many medical and behavioural reasons why we advise this. We neuter rabbits from 5 months of age onwards

Insurance

We recommend that you insure your rabbit. You can never predict accidents or injuries but being prepared is important and provides peace of mind. Insurance companies will pay vets bills for the owner, who will pay monthly or annual premiums, there will also be an excess to pay. We advise that you opt for a policy that covers your pet for life, some policies do not cover conditions for life.

Pet Care Plan

Here at My Pets Vets we offer a Pet Care Plan, which allows you to spread the cost of your rabbit's routine health care requirements over a 12 month period, whilst providing you with a substantial saving.