

# Rabbit Healthcare



Rabbits have been seen traditionally as a children's pet, but their curious yet timid nature lends them better to adult company. More and more people are keeping house rabbits which are more treated like cats – have access to ground level of the house, use a litter tray and even watch television.

This healthcare sheet provides you with information about general rabbit healthcare. It deals with outdoor housing, feeding, grooming, vaccination and neutering.

Rabbits are very sociable creatures and like other rabbit or human company. Contrary to traditional ideas of housing a rabbit with a guinea pig, it is best to house like with like as rabbits can seriously injure guinea pigs when play-fighting or trying to mate.

Obviously when housing rabbits together, it is responsible to check, and check again, the sex of the rabbits or have it neutered as two bunnies become twenty very quickly!

## Outdoor housing

All rabbits, whether house rabbits or outdoor rabbits, need access to the outdoor in form of a large and secure run, preferably without a mesh floor, as they can cause foot problems. Exercise is important for rabbits to prevent behavioural, obesity and spinal problems. So they need a large run or supervised 'hopping' in the open garden.

If sleeping outside, make sure the rabbit hutch is secure, cleaned weekly with bedding changed daily and that they always have access to hay and water.

## Feeding

The most common problems with rabbits are all diet related. Remember a rabbit is not a small dog or cat. They are in fact more like a cow or sheep, in that they constantly graze and their guts are constantly digesting.

Food needs to be available to them at all times or a lack of it can risk the bowels shutting down and this can result in death. A rabbit off their food for more than 12 hours should be brought in as an emergency to your vet!

Rabbits are designed to eat grass. Therefore grass and hay are the best diets for them. The pelleted and flaked foods is a diet of fast-food to the rabbit – tasty but not healthy – so this should make up only a maximum of 20% of their diet. Try giving them the grass cuttings after mowing the lawn. Dandelion

leaves go down a treat! Green leafy vegetables – spinach, cabbage, cauliflower leaves, lettuce, broccoli and root vegetables like carrots are great for variety and nutrition. Some fruit may be given as a treat – apple, pear, strawberry.

Also make sure the rabbit has some branches or wood available for chewing on to keep teeth trimmed down, like our own finger nails they grow constantly.

Unsuitable diets such as diets high in pelleted foods can cause overgrowing of teeth as the rabbit is not chewing enough. This can cause 'kebabing' of the tongue with the teeth on either side sticking through it or a tooth spike sticking through the check. These can be filed down to a normal level by your vet, but prevention is better than cure!

## Grooming

It is important for rabbits, as well as enjoying it, to have a good brush which reduces the possibility of fur balls and gut obstruction.

Nail trimming is also essential as rabbits' nails can get very sharp indeed. Call into us to show you how you can do this at home.

## Vaccination

We recommend that your rabbit is vaccinated at 10-12 weeks of age, and then annually, against two diseases:

Viral Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease (RHD), also known as rabbit calicivirus disease (RCD), is a highly infectious and often fatal disease within 12-32 hours from respiratory and heart failure.

Myxomatosis, a viral disease is also usually fatal with swelling of lips, eyelids, ears and general fever.

There are no effective treatments for either of these diseases. Both are spread by insects (fleas and flies) so a flea treatment is appropriate to prevent being bitten. However some flea treatments for small animals can cause death in rabbits, so please contact us and ask for our advice in parasite control.



## Neutering

Rabbits can reproduce from an early age and unfortunately it is only when an owner finds a newly born litter of rabbits that they realise that they don't have two males or females after all! Rabbits are



notoriously difficult to sex, so please let us confirm the sex of your rabbit for you.

Neutering male rabbits is a good idea as they can often become aggressive when older.

Speying female rabbits means that as well as preventing pregnancy, we prevent the development of uterine cancer. Uterine cancer is nearly always fatal and can occur even in young rabbits.

Neutering and spaying facilitates house training of indoor rabbits and allows harmonious communal housing.

**For further information or advice please do not hesitate to contact us.**

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**opening hours**

Monday, Wednesday & Friday  
8.30am–6.00pm

Tuesday & Thursday  
8.30am–7.00pm

Saturday  
10.00am–12.00 noon

**clinic hours**

Monday–Friday  
9.00–11.00am

Monday, Wednesday & Friday  
3.00–6.00pm

Tuesday & Thursday  
4.00–7.00pm

Saturday  
10.00am–12.00 noon

*Consultation by appointment only*



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veterinary clinic