

Rabbit Care - Information Sheet

DID YOU KNOW:

- A rabbit's life expectancy is 6 - 14 years
- The adult body weight of a rabbit can be from 2kg, up to 6kg, depending on breed.
- A rabbit is pregnant for 31 days.

FEEDING

- Herbivores
- Teeth grow continuously
- Rabbits eat their own faeces. There are two types of faeces - one is not fully digested and this is the one they will eat. This is normal.
- 80% of their diet must be hay or grass. Suitable hay types include: oaten hay, grass meadow hay, timothy hay. Lucerne hay is not appropriate for adults as it has too much calcium in it. Lucerne is okay for young growing rabbits, pregnant and lactating females. Hay is extremely important, for not only its fibre content but also chewing time. Chewing hay uses the full range of motion of the mouth which is very important for normal teeth wear.
- Dark green vegetables - ie broccoli, cabbage, celery, endive, beet/carrot tops, brussel sprouts, spinach leaves, bok choy, pak choy, kale.
- Herbs - ie parsley, dandelion, coriander, basil, dill, mint.
- Treats - only give a very small amount (no more than 1-2 tablespoons per rabbit per day). Examples include: fruit (ie banana or apple), carrot, capsicum.
- Pellets - ideally a high fibre (at least 19%) grass based pellet. Pellets should never be the sole source of food. The pellets should be the ones prepared specifically for rabbits, and not guinea pigs as well. Avoid pellets with seed and corn in them. Pellets should only be a small portion of the rabbit's diet. For example oxbow pellets - 1/8 of cup daily to 3/4 of a cup daily depending on the size of the rabbit. Oxbow is one of the best brands.
- Avoid - cereals, grains, nuts, seeds, corn, beans, peas, bread, biscuits, sweets, sugar, breakfast cereal and chocolate!
- Any dietary change should be introduced slowly.



HOUSING

- As large as possible - a hutch should only be a temporary enclosure. A play pen can be used for further exercise - dawn and dusk are good times to let your rabbit run around like crazy!
- Keep in an area which doesn't get too hot as rabbits are prone to heat stress.
- Well ventilated.
- Predator proof.
- Bedding - hay ideal.
- Burrow - make an area where your rabbit can hide when they need it. An up-turned box with a hole in it works well.
- Tunnel - some rabbits like tunnels. You can make one out of an old cardboard box.
- Water - dripper bottles can be used for young rabbits, however adults prefer water bowls.
- Social - rabbits are social, but be careful when introducing new rabbits to each other as they can fight, especially two entire males. Desexed rabbits often get on better with each other.
- Don't mix rabbits with guinea pigs, as guinea pigs can pick up diseases from them. Rabbits are also a lot bigger so may bully guinea pigs. Guinea pigs also require more vitamin C than rabbits.

HANDLING

- Be gentle until your rabbit is used to handling. If they have never been handled, then start with just patting and slowly move on from there.
- Always support the hindquarters when picking a rabbit up. Rabbits may kick out, scratch you or cause themselves serious injury while kicking out.

TEETH/CHEWING

- Teeth continuously grow so rabbits must have a lot of hay in their diet, as well as safe things to chew on.
- Chew toys – wooden chew toys from pet stores safe for rabbits, apple branches (pesticide free)
- Cardboard boxes, newspaper and old telephone books - these can be chewed on by your rabbit. However, take care that they don't just eat it. Destroying it is fine, but eating large amounts of paper isn't good for them! If your rabbit simply wants to eat the cardboard or paper, please remove it from their environment.
- Beware of cords, rabbits love to chew these!

COMMON DISEASES PROBLEMS AND PREVENTION

- Calicivirus - this is usually fatal and can be caught from any contact with wild rabbits and their secretions. Preventative vaccination is available and is recommended annually.
- Heat stroke – keep their enclosure in a place which doesn't get too hot.
- Dental disease – prevent with chew toys, hay, and good genetics.
- Mites – make sure the environment (& bedding) is clean and quarantine new rabbits.
- Urinary stones – often due to high calcium in the diet, obesity and or lack of exercise.
- Reproductive cancer – desexing earlier on will prevent this later in their life.
- Inflamed feet (pododermatitis)– avoid hutches with wire bottoms or abrasive surfaces, also avoid obesity.
- Respiratory disease – don't mix with guinea pigs, clean environment, quarantine new rabbits.
- Head tilt – the most common causes are ear infections or a protozoal disease. Ear infections can be difficult to prevent especially in lops which are prone to wax build up in their ears. If a large amount of wax is a problem, then cleaning with the appropriate ear cleaner can help. A small amount of wax can be normal. Protozoal disease may be prevented with a clean environment (especially urine) and avoiding contact with unwell rabbits.

