

RABBITS – WHAT YOU NEED TO CONSIDER

Rabbits and other small furrries need lots of care to keep them happy and healthy.

Where to get your pet

Consider carefully what sort of pet will best match your lifestyle. Do you have sufficient time/energy for a young rabbit? Could you give a loving home to a rescue pet? This website should help you www.your-right-pet.org.uk.

Register with a vet

Do this straight away, and make an appointment to get your new pet checked over as soon as possible. [Click here](#) or telephone **02476 464789** to register with us today! Your pet should be vaccinated regularly to keep them healthy. All our vaccinations include a **free** full health examination with a fully-qualified Veterinary Surgeon. Should your pet become ill, we offer [Consultations](#) and comprehensive [Facilities](#) to better diagnose and treat your pet.

Pet Insurance

You may have budgeted for routine healthcare costs such as vaccination and parasite treatment, but what if your pet is involved in an accident or is diagnosed with a serious disease requiring expensive or ongoing treatment? Pet insurance helps you budget for the unexpected, and we recommend you seriously consider it. Ask one of our fully-qualified Vets or Nurses for advice about the different types of insurance. And remember, if you bring your kitten in to us for their primary vaccination course, you will get 4 weeks' **free** insurance as part of our young Rabbit Package.



Microchipping

We advise that you consider microchipping your rabbit, as recommended by RSPCA and other major animal welfare organisations. Microchipping greatly increases the chances of you and your pet being reunited should they be lost or stolen. For more information visit: www.pet-works.net/microchipping and watch our [offers page](#) for regular microchip promotions.

Neutering

We recommend your rabbit and some other small furrries are neutered. Read our [neutering leaflet](#) to find out why.



A Safe and Comfortable Home

Sadly many hutches sold for rabbits are too small for them. Rabbits need a large weatherproof home that is raised off the ground, positioned out of direct sunlight and strong winds. The hutch should be big enough to allow them to lie down and stretch out comfortably in all directions, tall enough for them to stand up on their back legs without their ears touching the top, and long enough to allow at least three hops. A suggested minimum size for most rabbits is 6ft x 2ft x 2ft high. The hutch should be lined with newspaper or clean woodshavings, with soft

hay or straw on top. The sleeping area should contain clean, dry hay or straw as bedding. The hutch should be cleaned at least once a day, by removing any shavings or bedding that are wet and dirty, removing any uneaten fresh food and cleaning the food and water containers before refilling them. You also need to clean the hutch more thoroughly once a week to keep it clean and hygienic.

Rabbits should have access to a run in addition to a hutch, to ensure they get enough exercise. A run should be tall enough to allow the rabbits to stretch up to full height and they should be able to run, rather than just hop. A suggested minimum size of run for most rabbits is 8ft x 4ft x 2ft high. This must be escape-proof, safe from predators and offer some shade. The run should be attached to the hutch so that the rabbits can exercise whenever they want to. As rabbits like burrowing you should sink their run into the ground so that they can't burrow out.

In the winter, if it gets very cold, the hutch and run may have to be moved into an outhouse or car-free garage (car-free because exhaust fumes can be fatal). Rabbits can suffer from heatstroke, so in hot weather move the hutch and run into shaded areas.

Hazards and poisons to watch out for

Indoors, rabbits will chew through electric cables, so don't let rabbits have access to these.

There are many plants which are poisonous to rabbits. Do not let your rabbits go near plants or flowerbeds if you are not sure whether they might contain poisonous plants, or if they might have been sprayed with herbicides or pesticides. The following is a list of some, but certainly not all, plants to avoid:



- All plants that grow from bulbs
- Bracken
- Foxglove
- Laburnum
- Oak leaves
- Ragwort
- Yew
- Amaryllis
- Elder
- Lily-of-the-valley
- Most evergreens
- Privet
- Rhubarb leaves



Rabbits and company

Rabbits shouldn't be kept on their own. They are very social animals and get lonely if they don't have the company of another rabbit. The best combination is usually a neutered male with a neutered female. Un-neutered males and females shouldn't be kept together, as they will breed and may fight. Always introduce a second rabbit carefully and gradually – ask one of our Vets or Nurses for more advice.

Rabbits and guinea pigs shouldn't be kept together as rabbits can bully and injure guinea pigs and they both need company from their own kind.

Water

Fresh water must always be available. A suitable water bottle with a metal spout is a good way to provide water. Check your rabbits are using the bottle as some rabbits may be used to drinking from a bowl and may not change very easily. Whether using a bottle or a bowl, keep them clean at all times.

Feeding your rabbit

Many of the health problems that vets see rabbits with are caused by their diet. It is extremely important that you give them the right food. Lots of people have become used to feeding rabbits a bowl of rabbit 'muesli'. But these muesli-type mixes can cause real health problems, especially with the teeth. Instead the correct diet consists of:

1. Plenty of good quality hay (if you put the daily amount of hay next to the rabbit, it should be at least as big as the rabbit!)
2. A handful of fresh vegetables morning and evening
3. A tablespoon of commercial rabbit nuggets once daily (or twice daily if the rabbit weighs over 3.5kg)



Aim to feed a few different greens each day, including:

Asparagus	Basil	Broccoli	Brussels sprouts
Cabbage	Carrots	Cauliflower	Celeriac
Celery leaves	Chard	Chicory	Courgette
Dandelion	Dock	Endive	Green beans
Kale	Parsley	Radicchio	Radish tops
Rocket	Spinach	Salad peppers	Watercress



Fruit may be given occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar. Apples, grapes, pears, plums and strawberries (including the leaves) are suitable.

There are natural treats available which your rabbits will enjoy and are good for their teeth and digestive health. Avoid sugary treats, such as ones made with honey, as these can cause teeth problems and diarrhoea.

Holidays

If you go on holiday, you need to arrange for someone responsible to care for your rabbit, be it a friend, neighbour, petsitter or boarding establishment. [Click here](#) for links to local petsitters and catteries.

Play

Rabbits need lots of exercise and they can get this if they have plenty of space in a large hutch and run. They also need things to do, so they don't get bored, and places to hide because they get scared easily. Toys and hiding places include things like large tubes and platforms, cardboard boxes to explore and untreated logs. Rotate the toys, to ensure your rabbit stays stimulated. Rabbits love to dig, and a great way of letting them do this is to give them a planter filled with potting compost.



Toilet-training

Rabbits can be trained to use a litter tray. Put one where you want them to toilet and place some of their droppings in it. Use a non-clumping, non-toxic litter and offer a food reward, such as a small piece of a natural rabbit treat, each time your rabbit jumps into the tray and uses it.

Grooming and Preventing Fly Strike

Fly strike is a very unpleasant condition caused by flies laying their eggs on dirty fur. These hatch into maggots which eat into the rabbit's flesh and can kill a rabbit in a matter of hours. Rabbits should be checked daily and their hutch cleaned regularly. Most at risk are rabbits that get dirty around their back end, so you should make sure the hutch and living environment are cleaned out regularly. If rabbits don't groom their fur properly and allow it to get dirty, this can be a sign of a health problem, so you should visit your vet.



Getting rabbits used to being checked and groomed from an early age to that they become used to it is advisable. Long-haired breeds will need to be groomed daily. Ask our fully-qualified staff for advice on how to prevent Fly Strike.