

RABBIT BASICS



QUICK FACTS

- Average life span: 8 – 14 yrs
- Reproductive age: doe- 4 – 9 mo, buck- 6 – 10 mo
- Average litter size: 4 – 10 bunnies
- Gestation length: 29 – 35 days
- Teeth continually grow: Incisors and Back teeth – 0.3 mm per day
- Rabbits eat their cecotrophs. Cecotrophs are feces that are excreted overnight containing much of the protein that rabbits require in their diet. They are generally ingested directly from the rectum in the early morning.

DIET

Under 6 months of age: Daily

-free choice of alfalfa hay (may add timothy hay as well)

-free choice of pellets that are alfalfa based. These pellets SHOULD NOT have any oats, seeds or dried fruits/vegetables added to them.

6 months and older: Daily

-free choice of timothy hay, orchard grass, bunny brome. No alfalfa unless pregnant or lactating

-timothy based pellets(no oats, seeds, or dried fruits/vegetables): 1/3 cup for small rabbits; ½ C for medium rabbits; heaping ½ C for large rabbits

-Oxbow Hay Company: 1-800-249-0366 www.oxbowhay.com

-6 months and older may also receive: Green leafy vegetables (the darker the green, the higher the nutritional value): **1/2 cup for large rabbits (9-12 lbs), 1/3 to 1/4 cup for smaller rabbits**. Examples: kale, romaine lettuce, escarole, parsley, endive, collard greens, dandelion greens, leaf lettuce, carrot/beet tops, water cress, Mustard greens, bok choy, chicory, basil, carrots, turnips, beats, & sweet potatoes.

-Fresh water should be provided at all times (If water bottles are used, they need to be checked daily for malfunctions)

TREATS

-Natural wood branches are great for rabbits. We recommend using: apple, pear, willow, or maple. To sterilize the wood and prevent parasite infection: clean branch with soap and water. Bake in oven for 50 minutes at 250 degrees.

-Never use oak, pine, or cherry (All are potentially toxic to rabbits).

-Fruit: apple, orange, banana, etc. (*Limit to a heaping tablespoon, per 2 lbs. of body weight per day or less*)

*Commercial treats should be totally avoided; stick to *natural* and *healthy* treats.

HOUSING

Minimum sizing for small breeds: 24" x 24" x 18"; large breeds: 36" x 36" x 24". Cages should have solid floor area.

Cages should provide stimulating activities for rabbits, such as toys, hay to constantly munch on, set near window, or active area in house to keep rabbits from becoming depressed and discontented (avoid solid walls).

Ideally rabbits should be housed indoors. There are many rabbits that are hurt or killed each year from predator's attacks through what appears to be safe cages when kept outdoors. If possible they should be allowed outdoors supervised in areas that are not treated with fertilizers or pesticides. Also, make sure it is not an area where wild animals may defecate/urinate at night, since they may get something.

BEDDING

Ideal substrates include any of the paper based products (i.e. care fresh). Towels may also be used, but need to be checked to make sure the rabbit is not ingesting any of the material.

LITTER BOX TRAINING

- Start with small area, pick a corner where rabbit has already used, and add a litter box to that corner
- Recyclable litters should be used; shavings are not advised due to their undigestability
- Add a small amount of hay on top of litter to entice rabbit to sit in box
- Neutering (spaying-females or castration-males) will also make them more likely to use the litter box.

REMEMBER: Rabbits are not cats and are **not likely** to use litter box 100% of the time

EXERCISE

Rabbits need plenty of time out of cage daily to provide exercise; Lack of exercise can lead to numerous medical or behavioural problems.

SCHEDULE OF VETERINARY CARE

Annual physical exam; Spay/Neuter at 3-6 months of age; Nail trims as needed.

Why Should I get my Rabbit fixed?

For both males and females this will prevent unwanted litters. Female rabbits have a high rate of reproductive tumors which can be virtually eliminated with spaying under a year of age. Many rabbits if left unfixed will develop serious undesirable behaviors such as spraying.

COMMON MEDICAL PROBLEMS

Cancer in female rabbits: prevent by spaying at young age (Strongly Recommended)

Aggressiveness and **urine spraying**: prevent by neutering at young age

Overgrown teeth due to misalignment: have checked by veterinarian as needed

Diarrhea: true diarrhea is uncommon but soft stools are common. Intermittent soft stools are normal (soft stools will commonly be at night; hard stools during the day). Sudden diet change or low fiber diet may cause persistent diarrhea, introduce new foods slowly and follow diet recommendations listed above

Pasteurellosis: runny nose, loss of appetite, decreased activity, abnormal head posture, skin lesions

Fur mites: Causes excessive hair loss and dander ('dandruff')

Pododermatitis: Sores usually on the bottom of the back feet from inactivity, improper flooring, obesity, or trauma.

Ear infections: This is primarily a problem in lops, due to poor air circulation in the ear.

Head tilts: This can be from many different causes such as: Inner ear infections, *E. cuniculi* (protozoan parasite), neoplasia (cancer), parasitic migration in the brain (i.e. Bayliss ascaris), brain abscess, and intoxication to name the more common ones.

Ileus: Improper diet, consumption of indigestible fibers (i.e. carpet or towels), intestinal dysbiosis, as well as many other health issues.