

Caring For Your Rabbit

1. Feeding:



Rabbits are herbivores- animals that need a plant based diet. The most important part of their diet which they require to stay healthy is fibre. If the wrong diet is fed, one that is low in fibre and high in carbohydrates, for example a commercial muesli mix, problems such as dental disease, facial abscesses, obesity, diarrhoea and furballs may occur. The best diet for your rabbit should consist of at least 99% grass and good quality meadow or timothy hay which should be available at all times. Greens such as broccoli, cabbage and watercress are also essential. Some rabbits fed on mainly commercial muesli mixes (high in sugar and starch) will only pick out the unhealthy, sweeter pellets of the mix leading to potentially fatal health problems. We recommend the Burgess Excel and Supreme Science Selective feeding range. These products are veterinary recommended because they contain the same amount of high quality nutrients in each individual nugget, eliminating the problem of selective feeding. Rabbits should only be fed a maximum of 25g of nuggets per kg per day as the nuggets are a complementary food. The bulk of their diet should be made up of hay and grass. We will be happy to advise you on a suitable diet for your rabbit.

2. Vaccination:



Your rabbit should be vaccinated against Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (V.H.D) regardless of whether it is a house rabbit or not. Both these diseases can be fatal within several days of your rabbit becoming ill. Myxomatosis is spread by bloodsucking insects such as mosquitoes or rabbit fleas. Once infected, fluid filled swellings occur around the head and face leading to blindness. Swellings around the genitals and ears along with eye infections are also common. The Myxomatosis vaccination should be given from 6-8 weeks of age and regular boosters given every 6 months. Viral Haemorrhagic Disease is spread by direct contact between rabbits (wild and domesticated) and also via fleas, people, shoes and other objects. The V.H.D. vaccination should be given from 10-12 weeks of age but must be given 2 weeks after the Myxomatosis vaccination. A yearly booster is then required to maintain immunity. We will send you a reminder when their vaccinations are due but please make sure you keep their vaccination certificate in a safe place and make a note on the calendar when they are due!

3. Worming:



We recommend worming your rabbit with a veterinary supplied wormer available from the veterinary practice. This helps protect your rabbit against worms and a parasite called E.Cunucli. It can cause symptoms similar to that of a stroke leading to blindness, kidney failure and death. Not all rabbits that carry E.Cunucli show any signs of illness but they are still capable of infecting other rabbits that live with them either by their urine or passing it from mother to babies.

- 4. Flea Control:** We advise regular treatment for fleas all year round once your rabbit is over 10 weeks of age. This helps prevent infestations and helps protect against the spread of Myxomatosis. It is easily achieved by using a spot on treatment available from the veterinary practice. These are applied to the back of your rabbit's neck and will treat any flea infestation for up to one week.



- 5. Neutering:** Male and female rabbits can be neutered from five months of age before they become sexually mature. It is important to have your rabbit neutered if you are keeping both male and females together or if there are any behavioural problems such as dominance or aggression.



- 6. Dental Care:** Rabbits teeth grow continuously as much as 10-12cm every year. Rabbits which are not fed a suitable diet are more prone to suffer from dental disease in the form of overgrown teeth, malocclusion (incorrect alignment of teeth) and tongue ulceration. This can be due to a lack of fibre in their diet to gnaw on. Regular dental checks by the veterinary surgeon are essential for early detection of these problems. Your rabbit's nails can also easily become overgrown and should be closely monitored.



- 7. Flystrike:** During the summer months your rabbit is at an increased risk of having Flystrike. This is caused by flies which lay their eggs on your rabbit usually in the hindquarters area. These eggs then hatch into maggots in as little as 12 hours burrowing into your rabbit's skin and eating it away. The fly season generally runs from April to October so your rabbit could potentially be at risk most of the year. High risk rabbits are those that suffer from obesity, dental disease, diarrhoea, arthritis and those kept in dirty hutches that attract flies. It is always important to check your rabbit daily but during the summer they should be checked at least twice a day. If Flystrike is not treated early enough it can be fatal. Your rabbit can be protected from Flystrike for up to 10 weeks by applying a product available from the veterinary practice. We will be happy to advise you on the suitable treatment.



- 8. Insurance:** Although insurance is most commonly thought about for cats and dogs, insurance is also available for your rabbit. Pet insurance can be essential to help cover the cost of unexpected veterinary fees and there are a variety of policies available.



- 9. Grooming:** Grooming is an important part of looking after your rabbit especially if they are long haired! Regular grooming will aid in early detection of problems such as Flystrike and also enable your rabbit to become accustomed to being handled and examined. Older or overweight rabbits may have difficulty in keeping themselves clean and become matted around their bottom. It is normal for rabbits to eat their softer droppings (caecotrophs) usually at night as this is also an important part of their high fibre diet. If they become overweight or unable to groom then problems will occur with their digestive system and veterinary advice should be sought.



10. Poisonous Plants



Although feeding greens and plants to your rabbit adds variety and interest to their diet it is important to remember that some plants can be very harmful if eaten, causing illness or in some cases death.

The following plants are poisonous to rabbits and should be avoided- Carnation, Buttercup, Foxglove, Clematis, Deadly nightshade, Lobelia, Woody nightshade, Elder, Yew, Rhododendron, Privet, Geranium, Ivy, Lily of the Valley, Lupin and Iris.



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