



RABBIT CARE

All Creatures Animal Hospital



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Rabbit Tips

- *Keep in a clean safe cage when not supervised*
- *Feed hay, limited pellets, and high fiber vegetables*
- *Spay or neuter*
- *Annual checkups*
- *Handle carefully*
- *Trim nails regularly*

Housing

When not supervised, rabbits should be caged in safe, durable, easily cleaned cages. Several basic types are commercially available and they are not difficult to build. It must be kept in mind that rabbits can chew through all but the most durable of materials, and that porous materials, such as unfinished wood, are impossible to clean adequately. Rabbits are often kept on wire surfaces to allow the urine to fall through and therefore avoid soiling the fur of the rabbit. This is the most sanitary method of maintaining the rabbit. Some rabbits however, lack the soft fur pad on the soles of their feet

and may develop sore hocks, small ulcers on the bottom of the rear feet. Ask the veterinarian which type of flooring is best for your type of rabbit.

Rabbits are extremely hardy and may be kept outdoors all year as long as proper shelter is provided. This practice is not conducive to making the rabbit a tame pet, however. For pet rabbits, it is advised that they are kept indoors in a cage while the owner is away or asleep, and allowed to roam the house when someone can watch it. Litterbox training the rabbit makes this possible with a minimum of mess. In general training a

rabbit to the litterbox follows the same rules as with a cat. Start out with the rabbit confined to a relatively small area with the litterbox and gradually increase the freedom allowed. Female rabbits are generally cleaner and easier to litterbox train. It is important that rabbits are not allowed to roam unsupervised in areas that could be hazardous. Ingested carpet fibers, chewed electrical cords, poisons, and other dangers are irresistible to a curious rabbit.



Freedom is great, but there are lots of hazards in the house for rabbits.

Where to get a rabbit

Domestic rabbits are widely available pets. As prolific breeders, there is actually an overabundance of rabbits compared to the number of good homes for them.

Rabbits can frequently be found in animal shelters and from local House Rabbit Society foster homes. These rab-

bits are usually adults and many have already been spayed or neutered. This is an excellent way to get a rabbit with a known personality and one that really needs a home.

Young rabbits can often be purchased at pet stores or directly from rabbit breeders. When selecting such a rabbit,

it is important to look closely for signs of illness, not only in the selected one, but also in the cage mates.

Once adopted, new rabbits should be brought in for a checkup.

Diet



Rabbit pellets can be a part of a healthy diet.

There are complete pelleted diets formulated for rabbits. However, these diets were developed for animals that were used in research or meat and fur production. The diets support maximum growth rates but probably are not ideal for longevity, gut function and overall health. The intestinal tract of this species is highly specialized for digesting fiber. When inadequate fiber is given, the motility is reduced, the wrong types of bacterial flora proliferate, and endotoxins may be produced. Impactions (i.e. hairballs), diar-

rhea, enterotoxemia, and other disorders may result from the excessive feeding of grains (i.e. pellets, seeds, cereals, breads). Additionally, pellets have higher levels of protein and calcium than is necessary for adult animals. While growing pets may be fed as much as they want, it is advisable to limit the pellets of adults. Adults should be given about 1 tablespoons of pellets for each pound of body weight. In addition to the pellets, a quality grass hay such as timothy should be given *ad libitum* (as much as they want).

Grass hay is preferred to alfalfa since it is lower in protein and calcium. Chopped vegetables and fruit in roughly the same quantities as the pellets will provide the remainder of the diet. Food should be offered in a dish suspended an inch or two above the bedding or in a heavy dish. Food offered on the bottom of the cage may be soiled by droppings or urine.

Water should always be available in sipper tubes and should be changed daily.

Breeding

It is relatively common for parents to get rabbits for children so that they can see the "miracle of birth". While this may seem like a good life lesson, it must be considered that a litter of rabbits may be as large as 12 kittens (babies). If homes cannot be assured for all of them, it is best not to undertake such a project. Also, even very tame does

(female rabbits) may become aggressive when pregnant.

Small breed does may be able to breed as young as 4 months but medium and large rabbits may not be ready until 5 to 7 months. Males (bucks) may not be fertile until 6 to 7 months. For breeding, a doe should be put in the buck's cage for about 30 minutes. The doe should then be provided with a nest

box. During breeding the feed consumption should not be limited. Birth (kindling) will occur 29 to 35 days after mating. An average litter is 6 kittens but some litters are as large as 12 and some as few as one. The doe nurses only once a day and spends much time away from the kittens. This should not be mistaken for neglect.

"a litter of rabbits may be as large as 12...If homes cannot be assured...it is best not to undertake such a project."

Neutering

Rabbits not destined for breeding should be spayed (females) or neutered (males).

Ovariectomy is the technical term for a spay. This procedure prevents several serious diseases such as uterine or mammary tumors. These are the most common types of cancer in rabbits. In

addition, rabbits are not as stressed when they go through heat cycles. Some rabbits go through false pregnancies and can even begin to produce milk, leading to painful cysts in the mammary glands.

In males, an orchietomy is performed. This technique will prevent testicular tumors

and abscesses. In addition, it helps prevent some behavior problems of rabbits and reduces the odor of the urine.

Following a spay or neuter, rabbits metabolism changes somewhat. It is important to avoid overfeeding at this point.



In addition to preventing overpopulation, neutering prevents several diseases.

Veterinary Care

In order to maintain the health of rabbits, it is important to determine the presence of any problems. Since they are adept at masking the signs of illness, regular examinations are a valuable addition to preventative care.

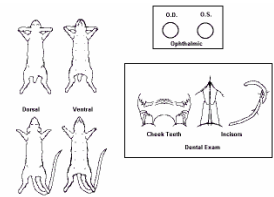
New rabbits should be examined soon after they enter the home. At this time the veterinarian can establish the current health of the rabbit and give recommendations for husbandry. If they have not

been spayed or neutered, this should be done in the first month if adult or at age 3-6 months if they come home as a baby.

After this initial examination annual examinations should be maintained to monitor for early problems. Problems detected early can often be treated much more easily and effectively.

Some rabbits will require filing of the rear teeth periodi-

cally. This procedure is painless but requires immobility. Isoflurane, a very safe anesthetic gas is administered to the rabbit by a face mask until sleeping. The mouth is then opened and any sharp hooks on the teeth are filed. This can prevent mouth sores and other problems from occurring.



Regular veterinary care can head off problems before they get too serious.

Handling

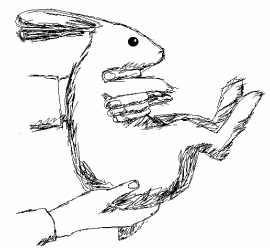
Rabbits have a slight design flaw. They have extremely powerful hind legs but a relatively fragile spine. This combination makes them very susceptible to fracturing their backs.

Whenever rabbits are picked up, the front and back end should be supported. Tame pets can have one hand cupped under the chest to

support the front, and the second hand under the rump to support the rear end.

Rabbits that are frightened, or simply intolerant of being lifted should be held more securely. The loose skin on the back of the neck can be grasped with one hand and the second hand supports the rump and secures the rear legs.

Many rabbits are very social and very much enjoy human contact but get very nervous when lifted. Unless required for maintenance procedures, it may be best to let rabbits stay on solid ground.



Rabbits should have both front and back supported.

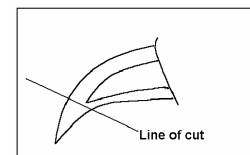
Grooming

Most rabbits will do most of their own grooming. They keep their fur clean and maintain themselves well. There are a few things they may need help with however. The first is trimming the toenails. Rabbit nails were designed for digging and as such they grow very long and very straight. Pet rabbits do not get to dig

enough to keep them worn down. Once every 4-8 weeks, it is a good idea to trim the tips of the nails. If the nail is clear, the quick can be seen as a pink area within the nail. Dark nails are more difficult. The quick should be avoided. Have one of our staff show you how to trim the nails.

If you do this at home, you should have some styptic powder or cream available. Nicking a quick is not life-threatening but it can be messy and it does hurt the rabbit.

Brushing, bathing, or ear cleaning may be required under certain circumstances.



Nail trimming may be required every 4-8 weeks.



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Our Mission

All Creatures Animal Hospital is dedicated to providing progressive medicine in a caring environment for pets of all species. Through preventative medicine, client education, professional development of our staff, and advanced medical and surgical techniques, we hope to foster a strong and lasting bond with clients and their pets.

Social Needs of Rabbits

Rabbit social structure is a paradox. They are both territorial and social. It is helpful to look at the wild European rabbit, the ancestor of the domestic rabbit. Rabbit warrens are groups of rabbits sharing a range. The rabbits benefit from the presence of the others because with many eyes and ears looking out for danger, it is harder for predators to sneak up on anyone.

Within this range, however, each has a space which may be defended from other rabbits. Most fights are minor and quick as long as the losing rabbit goes away when it's over.

In captivity, rabbits are often confined into cages that are too small for more than one territory. If they are to be kept together, they should have much larger accommodations. Even then, rabbits should first be allowed to become accustomed to each other under supervision before being confined together. If smaller cages must be used, each rabbit should be kept individually and allowed to socialize outside of the cages.

Human contact can substitute for companionship with another rabbit, provided that the rabbit is accustomed to humans. This interaction is of

course the whole reason people keep pets. As long as the pet is not fearful of humans, the interaction are mutually beneficial. Most rabbits prefer to keep their feet on the ground rather than be lifted up.

Children and other pets should be closely supervised around rabbits. Aside from outright injury, rabbits can be severely stressed by the erratic movement of some animals and children.



Rabbits are both social and territorial