



Most rabbits are quiet, affectionate animals that make wonderful pets. They can also be very interactive and playful and can be quite entertaining to watch! It is important to understand that they are *not* just small dogs or cats, though. They have unique requirements for their care that many new owners are not aware of. Your rabbit veterinarian will discuss how to properly care for your new pet and keep him or her healthy and happy!

WHAT DO I FEED MY RABBIT?

Proper nutrition is one of the most important aspects of your rabbit's health. Unlimited amounts of *grass hay* should be offered daily. Timothy hay is a good choice. Alfalfa is too high in calories and should be avoided unless recommended by your veterinarian.

In addition, *fresh vegetables* should be offered. Collard greens, endive, dandelion greens, carrot tops, mustard greens, parsley, romaine lettuce, red or green leaf lettuce, watercress, basil, bok choy, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cilantro, clover, and radish tops are all good choices. Spinach, kale, and cabbage may be fed occasionally.

Rabbit pellets are actually not even necessary for most rabbits, and excess amounts lead to obesity, dental disease, and gastrointestinal disease. If you choose to feed rabbit pellets, limit the amount to 2-3 tablespoons per 5 pounds.

High fiber fruits such as apples, blueberries, melon, papaya, and strawberries may be offered as *treats* in limited quantities. Avoid sugary treats, seeds or nuts, chocolate, cereals or grains, potatoes, bread, pasta, yogurt, ice cream, beans, peas, and candy.

Vitamin or mineral supplements and salt blocks are not necessary if your rabbit is fed a high quality diet.

Finally, *fresh water* provided daily in either water bottles or sturdy crocks is essential. If using water bottles, make sure the sipper tubes do not become clogged. Remember to wash your dishes and bottles at least weekly.

WHERE SHOULD I KEEP MY RABBIT?

You should *always* keep your rabbit in a hutch, cage, or small rabbit-proofed room when he or she is not supervised. Wire cages provide more ventilation than aquariums. However, wire-bottomed cages should have wood, cardboard, plastic, or hay to protect your rabbit's feet. The size of the cage should be at least 3 times the length of your rabbit, though bigger cages are definitely appreciated! Recycled newspaper products, shredded paper towels, newspapers, straw, or hay may be used for bedding. Do not use pine or cedar chips, corncobs, or clay litter. A box for hiding and sleeping and a litter box should be provided. Your cage should be cleaned at least weekly.

If you keep your pet outside, make sure you can maintain the temperature of the hutch between 55-90° F. It should be sheltered from excessive sun and predators.

Exercise is important and should be allowed daily. Exercise pens can be created with baby gates or wire fences.

Rabbits need environmental enrichment to prevent boredom. The best and safest toys are actually quite inexpensive. Paper towels, toilet paper rolls, and cardboard boxes are very exciting! There are also a variety of hard plastic toys and tunnels made especially for rabbits.

Prevent access to electrical cords, blankets or loose carpet that could be ingested, lead paint, houseplants, pesticides or cleaning products, tobacco and cigarette smoke, and unsupervised dogs, cats, or other predators.

DO I HAVE TO SPAY OR NEUTER MY RABBIT?

Yes! It is ideal to spay or neuter your pet rabbit around 4-6 months of age. Spayed females and neutered males are less territorial, less aggressive, and mark less with both urine and feces. More importantly, unspayed female rabbits over the age of 2 years have an extremely high rate of life-threatening uterine and mammary cancer.

VETERINARY CARE

Your rabbit should have a physical examination performed every year by a knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian. Rabbits hide illness until they are very sick, so it is important to seek help early. Contact a veterinarian if you notice any of the following:

Poor appetite	Abnormal stools
Difficulty eating	Hair loss or matted fur
Lumps	Dandruff or flaky skin
Crusts or wax in ears	Bleeding
Sneezing or coughing	Discharge from nose/eyes
Overgrown teeth	Drooling
Sores on the feet	Listlessness
Head tilt	Painful abdomen

LACK OF APPETITE IS AN EMERGENCY IN RABBITS!!

DID YOU KNOW?

- Average life span: 6-9 years.
- Rabbits are *lagomorphs*, not rodents. They have an additional set of incisors called *peg teeth*.
- Rabbit teeth grow continuously.
- There are about 45 breeds.
- Rabbits eat *cecotrophs* which are special droppings that contain important nutrients.
- Always support a rabbit's hindquarters. If handled improperly, rabbits can break their backs.
- Female rabbits have a dewlap.