

## Rabbits

### Feeding

A rabbit's diet should consist mainly of hay or grass (minimum 70%) and dark leafy greens or vegetables. You could also give a *SMALL* amount of rabbit food (equivalent to a half egg-cupful). Because rabbits often select which foods they like, their vitamin and mineral intake can become unbalanced and this can lead to dental problems. To avoid this happening we suggest that they are fed a "single pellet diet" rather than a muesli mix. A good example is Supa Rabbit Excel.

### Vaccinations

We recommend vaccinating your bunny against Myxomatosis and Viral haemorrhagic disease (VHD). These are both caused by viruses and can be fatal. Even house rabbits can be affected by these diseases. The VHD virus can live for a long time in the environment and can be spread on clothing and footwear and by birds and insects. Myxomatosis is spread by fleas and mosquitoes. Vaccination against myxomatosis can be started as early as 6 weeks of age and boosters are given annually, or every six months if in an area of higher risk. VHD vaccination is started from ten weeks of age and is boosted every twelve months. The two vaccinations cannot be given together and therefore are split by a minimum of two weeks apart.

### Dental disease

Because your rabbit's teeth will continue to grow it is important that they wear down sufficiently. Inappropriate wear of the teeth or an imbalanced diet can lead to overgrowth of the teeth and pain. Runny eyes and abscesses are also a common consequence of poor dental health. Ask your vet to check your bunny's teeth each time he comes in for a check-up. If a problem is suspected then your bunny may require an anaesthetic to examine his teeth properly.

### Other health checks

Check your bunny **DAILY** to ensure he has a clean dry nose, bright eyes, and clean coat. Also check his bottom is clean (ideally twice daily in warmer weather). If his back end becomes soiled it can be a sign that he is unwell e.g. a digestive upset or is in pain. If your bunny is overweight then he may struggle to clean himself. Flies are attracted to any wounds or soiling in any pet and if the flies lay eggs in the fur, the maggots that hatch can eat into the flesh causing acute pain and suffering. This is called FLYSTRIKE. There are products that can help prevent flystrike. The product we recommend is REARGUARD™ and this is applied every ten weeks in fly season (typically April to October).

## Company and exercise

Rabbits are naturally sociable creatures that thrive on company and plenty of exercise. We recommend that they are kept in pairs where possible. *The ideal pairing is a neutered male and neutered female.* We recommend that they are NOT kept with a guinea pig.

## Neutering

We recommend the neutering of rabbits of both sexes. This can make them easier to litter train/less likely to spray urine and be more sociable to their companions and their handlers. Spaying a female rabbit decreases territorial behaviour and can prevent cancer and other diseases of the womb later in life. Females reach sexual maturity at 4-5months of age and males at 5-8months of age. If keeping a mixed sex pair we would recommend that both are neutered at 4 months of age.

Rabbits can be microchipped and can be covered by pet insurance

## Emergencies: when to ring the vet IMMEDIATELY

- If your rabbit has difficulty breathing, or has bluish lips/tongue
- Your rabbit is limp, floppy, cold, or hasn't eaten or drunk for 12 hours
- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Flystrike (maggots or clusters of eggs) (DO NOT BATH!)
- Severe diarrhoea
- You suspect a broken back or broken leg
- Your rabbit is in pain

## Useful contacts

Rabbit welfare fund national helpline 0870 046 5249

[www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk](http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk)

[www.medirabbit.co.uk](http://www.medirabbit.co.uk) for a full list of all vegetables/fruits/herbs suitable for your rabbit to eat