

RABBIT INFORMATION PACK

Rabbits can make friendly, intelligent pets suitable for both adults , and families with children. They can live 8-12 years if cared for properly so are a long term commitment-they should not be considered a short term children's pet. As a sociable prey species, they have very specific needs which must be adequately met to ensure a long and happy life. We hope that this guide will help.

Housing

Ideally, rabbits should be kept with at least one other rabbit (NOT guinea pigs) for companionship. They may be kept in single sex groups or (subject to neutering) mixed groups or pairs.

Rabbits can be kept indoors or outside, but must be provided with a secure living area which should have enough space to exercise freely and allow them to stand fully upright. A bed/nest area where they can feel secure is also important. Ensure that this area is draught free and not too hot in Summer , or too cold in Winter. Wood shavings, straw or shredded paper can be used as bedding but ensure that that it is kept clean and dry-poor hygiene can result in skin sores and fly strike (maggot infestation) Rabbits are generally clean by nature and can usually be litter trained relatively easily.

In outside runs, tubes provide an additional feeling of security-ensure that you have at least one per rabbit. Your rabbit will also appreciate the provision of suitable chews and toys to keep them occupied.

Do not forget that rabbits like to dig so be sure that outside pens are secure-a litter tray or small sand pit filled with soil, bark chips or even towels can allow your rabbit to express their normal digging behaviour.

Indoor Rabbits

Rabbits can be kept as house pets but remember that they like to chew and are inquisitive-they can be destructive to carpets and furniture and it is important to remove toxic houseplants and unprotected electrical cables from their reach. They are generally best provided with a large secure cage in the house and let out only in a safe environment or when fully supervised.

Diet

A correct diet is essential for maintaining health-rabbits need a very low energy, high fibre diet to maintain the health of the digestive system and to ensure that their teeth do not become overgrown. Provide unlimited sweet- smelling, non- dusty quality hay or grass, supplemented with some mixed (mainly leafy green) vegetables and herbs, with a small amount (approx. 25g per kg) of high fibre pelleted nuggets or pellets (such as Burgess Excel

or Supreme Selective) Avoid muesli type mixes, high fat or starchy/sugary treats and too many root vegetables. Providing an incorrect diet can result in obesity, dental disease, gastrointestinal problems , bladder problems and fly strike.

Avoid sudden changes in diet-any change in diet should be gradual - over a period of several days-introduce new foods only in very small amounts initially.

Fresh drinking water must be provided at all times from either clean drinking bottles or bowls. If using bottles, check that the mechanism is working and that they do not constantly drip and create a moist environment for bacteria to breed. Check the water daily in very cold weather to ensure that it is not frozen.

Neutering

Neutering your rabbit is beneficial for several reasons-it allows you to keep rabbits together without risk of unwanted pregnancies and reduces the incidence of behavioural problems , such as spraying urine and aggression. Spaying female rabbits also prevents uterine cancer which can occur in as many as 80% of does over 4 years of age.

Rabbits are sexually mature at 3-6 months of age. We recommend that young rabbits are separated into single sex groups at 3 months of age. Males can be neutered as soon as the testicles descend, usually from about 3 months of age. Females are usually neutered from around 5-6 months of age. If you have a mixed pair and are unable to separate them, it is usually possible to neuter both at around 4 months to minimise the risk of pregnancy.

Vaccination

All rabbits should be vaccinated against rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) and myxomatosis. Myxomatosis is a very common virus which is transmitted by biting flies and insects, thus putting even indoor rabbits at risk. A combined vaccine may be given from 5 weeks of age. Boosters are then given with an annual health check every 12 months. This check is also a useful opportunity to pick up early signs of health problems, particularly obesity and dental disease.

Parasites

Parasites such as ear mites, fur mites and fleas can occur in pet rabbits. We advise that you check your rabbit regularly for signs of flea dirt , scaling of the coat and waxy ears and contact us if you have any concerns.

Also very common is a parasite called E. Cuniculi which can cause kidney disease, hindlimb weakness, head tilt and seizures. This parasite may be prevented by regular worming with **Panacur Paste**.

Insurance

You may wish to consider taking out pet insurance to cover vets bills in case of illness or accident-rabbit medicine has advanced considerably in the last ten years with specialist referral treatment now also available locally.

FOR MORE DETAILED ADVICE AND INFORMATION WE RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING DOWNLOADS

<http://www.petsavers.org.uk/Resources.aspx>

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/resources/index.php?section=leaflets.html>

WE ARE HERE TO HELP.....

We hope you have found this information useful. If you have any queries please feel free to discuss then with one of our nursing team.