

Rabbit Supply Checklist

-  **1. Habitat: Large solid bottom cage/condo, large dog crate or tall and wide puppy pen**
 - *** At least 4 feet long, 2 feet wide and 4 feet tall ***
 - *** No wire bottom cages, no outdoor hutches and no “rabbit cages” sold in pet stores ***
 - *** Many pictures and videos of Do-It-Yourself rabbit condos are available online. They are easy and inexpensive to build, and rabbits love multi-level condos! ***
 - *** All habitats must have a soft cotton mat, blanket or towel over the flooring so your rabbit has a comfortable and cushioned area to sit and lay down on ***

-  **2. Travel Carrier – preferably hard plastic, small animal size**
 - *** Always lined with something soft and absorbent, such as towels or blankets ***
 - *** Hay should always be provided inside the carrier during any transport ***

-  **3. Litter boxes filled with hay, lined with newspaper and rabbit-safe litter**
 - *** Only paper-pulp based litter; No cat clumping litter or pine/cedar shavings ***
 - *** Many rabbits will need more than one litter box to start training ***

-  **4. Timothy hay (or alfalfa hay for rabbits 7 months and younger)**
 - *** Must be available 24/7 in unlimited quantities and is the foundation of diet ***

-  **5. Good-quality Timothy hay based rabbit pellets (or alfalfa pellets for rabbits under 6 months)**
 - *** No pellets with nuts, seeds, dried fruit or colorful “treats” in them ***
 - *** Pellets should have at least 20% crude fiber, no more than approximately 14% protein, about 1% fat and about 1.0% calcium. - Recommended brand is Oxbow or Selective***

-  **6. Sturdy ceramic or metal food bowls for pellets and greens**
 - *** Pellets are to be provided in limited quantities (see guide for proper amounts) ***
 - *** Fresh, washed greens are an essential part of diet and must be provided daily ***

-  **7. Heavy ceramic water bowl/crock or water bottle that attaches to cage**
 - *** To encourage hydration, fresh and clean water must be available 24/7 ***
 - *** Bowls/crocks are a more natural way for a rabbit to drink than water bottles ***

-  **8. Grooming brush, safety nail clippers, styptic powder, simethicone (baby gas medicine, Little Tummys brand), 1 cc dropper/syringe, digital safety thermometer, Vaseline, safety heating pad (SnuggleSafe brand)**
 - *** Gentle, rabbit-safe brush is needed to help remove hair during shedding periods ***
 - *** Safety nail clippers are needed to trim nails every 2 months, and styptic powder such as Kwik Stop brand should be on hand in case nail quick is accidentally clipped ***
 - *** Medical supplies are vital to save rabbits that go into stasis after vet office hours ***

-  **9. Hidey house (to feel safe and hidden within habitat), digging box and safe chew toys**
 - *** Rabbits need toys and enrichment products to satisfy their urges to chew and dig, and the more toys and stimulation they have, the happier they will be! ***

-  **10. Large, carpeted and bunny-proof area for exercise**
 - *** Rabbits need at least 4-5 hours of exercise in a large, bunny-proof area every day ***
 - *** Rabbits need traction on the ground to safely run and jump while out playing, and they will slide and can injure themselves on a hard wood or tile floor ***
 - *** The larger the area, the more running and binkies you will see from your rabbit! ***

10-POINT PRIMER FOR NEW BUNNY FAMILIES

Mary E. Cotter, Ed.D., Licensed Educator, House Rabbit Society (mec@cloud9.net)

FOR ADOPTERS

1) Pine and cedar shavings are not recommended for use with rabbits and other small mammals. Inhaled phenols (the substances that make pine and cedar “smell good”) can cause liver changes in rabbits. Clay litters (clumping or non-clumping) are also not recommended. The “clumpers” can clump in the rabbit’s GI tract, and dust from plain clay litters can exacerbate respiratory problems.

2) Spaying and neutering is recommended for all rabbits. Rabbits can have a litter every 30 days, and can get pregnant within minutes after giving birth. Not only does spaying/neutering prevent unwanted litters, but it also protects female rabbits from uterine cancer (the rate as females grow older ranges from 50-80%), and permits male/female pairs to live happily together without being driven by their hormones.

3) Rabbits can easily be litterbox-trained—but you and the rabbit must “negotiate” this process. Start in a small area. Watch to see which corner the rabbit wants to use for urination, and place a litterbox there. Some rabbits need several litterboxes to start.

4) The primary component of a mature rabbit’s diet should be grass hay (Timothy, Brome, Orchard Grass, etc.). This should be given fresh daily, in large quantities. Hay can be ordered over the internet from various companies (see <http://www.rabbit.org/links/mail-order-resources.html>). Using hay as a litterbox material is ideal; it cushions the rabbit’s feet so they stay dry, and encourages the rabbit to munch on hay while he’s doing his business. To supplement hay, feed a daily salad of dark green leafy vegetables. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities. The unrestricted feeding of pellets leads to obesity and often to bladder sludge. If you use pellets, buy only perfectly plain ones; do not be tempted by the “fancier” pellets with their eye-catching seeds, nuts, corn, and other “tidbits.” These ingredients are simply not good for your rabbit over the long term, and some of them are downright dangerous.

5) Be sure to “bunny-proof” the areas where your rabbit will exercise. Many — though not all — rabbits are prodigious chewers. They will chew electrical wires, carpeting, and other objects commonly found in any household. Although many people keep rabbits outdoors, this is not recommended. Indoor rabbits live healthier, happier, longer (7-10 years or more) lives.

6) Never attempt to “punish” or “discipline” a rabbit. These tactics will often create fear and defensive biting. If you need help with a behavior problem, contact your local HRS representative or visit the HRS web site: www.rabbit.org.

7) Rabbits need veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine. Many wonderful vets are expert with other species, but are not knowledgeable about rabbits, and may administer inappropriate or harmful drugs in their efforts to help. To find a rabbit-savvy veterinarian in your area, contact your local HRS representative, or search the HRS web page: www.rabbit.org

8) Anorexia and /or watery diarrhea in rabbits should be considered emergencies. Seek expert veterinary care immediately.

9) Rabbits are not recommended for small children. Rabbits are prey animals by nature, and are easily frightened by children’s handling. Rabbits are often dropped by children, resulting in broken legs and backs. An adult should always be the rabbit’s primary caretaker, and should carefully supervise any children interacting with the rabbit.

10) The most common rabbit veterinary problems are: ear mites, ear infections, urinary tract infections, abscesses, tooth problems (incisor malocclusion and/or molar spurs), uterine cancer (in unspayed females), upper respiratory infections (watch for sneezing or runny eyes/nose), gastrointestinal slowdown or stasis, changes in balance or gait. A skilled rabbit veterinarian should be consulted for any of these problems.



Anatomy of a cage

Dog crate, puppy exercise pen, LeithPetwerks Condo, etc. No small "bunny cages"

Large cat litterbox, lined with newspaper section or Yesterday's News or Carefresh litter. Topped with quality Timothy Hay

Timothy hay available from Oxbowhay.com (800-249-0366)

Private area so bun can back up to a perceived "wall" for defecating

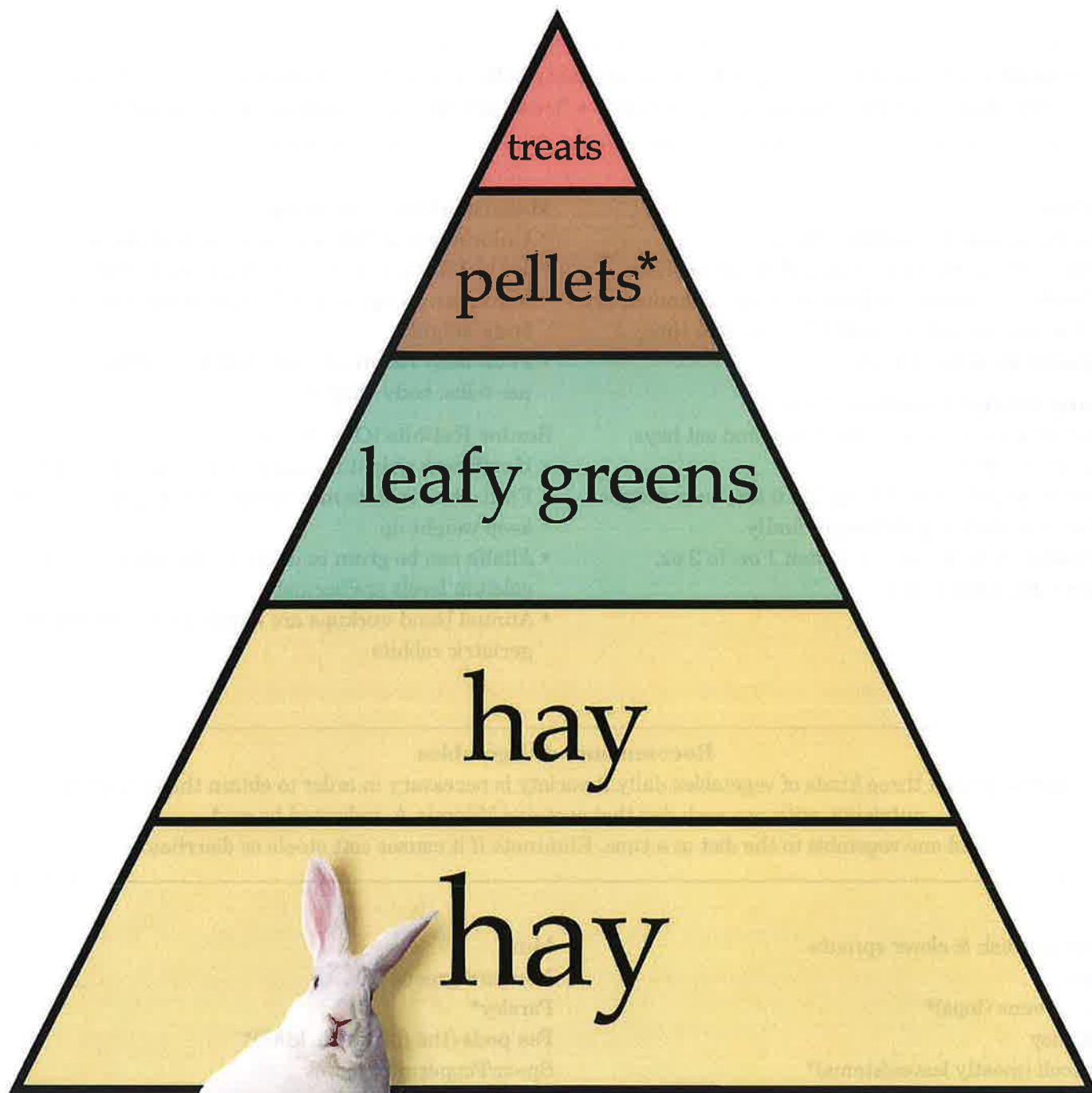


Untippable water crock

Toilet paper rolls stuffed with hay, sea grass or willow basketry (unpainted, of course) from craft stores, Ikea, busybunny.com, etc)

Enough space for litterbox, food and toys, and for bunny to stand up and lay fully stretched

Floor covered with corrugated cardboard and/or maize grass mats (Pier One) or cotton rugs. No slick floors, no wire floors.



Rabbit Food Pyramid

*1/4 to 1/3 cup pellets per 5 lbs. of body weight per day.
Dietary changes should be made gradually.

Artwork© 2007 Mary Ann Maier. Created in consultation with Jennifer Saver, D.V.M.

A rabbit's diet should be made up of fresh, good quality pellets, fresh hay (alfalfa, timothy or oat), water and fresh vegetables. Anything beyond that is a "treat" and should be given in limited quantities.

Babies

- Birth to 3 weeks--mother's milk
- 3 to 7 weeks--mother's milk, alfalfa and pellets
- 7 weeks to 7 months--unlimited pellets, unlimited hay
- 12 weeks--introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)

Young Adults (7 months to 1 year)

- Introduce timothy hay, grass hay, and oat hays, decrease alfalfa
- Decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- Increase daily vegetables gradually
- Fruit daily ration no more than 1 oz. to 2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight

Mature Adults (1 to 5 years)

- Unlimited timothy, grass hay, oat hay, straw
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lbs. body weight
- Minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
- Fruit daily ration no more than 2 oz. (2 TBL) per 6 lbs. body weight

Senior Rabbits (Over 6 years)

- If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- Frail, older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up
- Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal
- Annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits

Recommended Vegetables

Select at least three kinds of vegetables daily. A variety is necessary in order to obtain the necessary nutrients, with one each day that contains Vitamin A, indicated by an *.

Add one vegetable to the diet at a time. Eliminate if it causes soft stools or diarrhea.

Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts

Basil

Beet greens (tops)*

Bok choy

Broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)*

Brussels sprouts

Carrot & carrot tops*

Celery

Cilantro

Chicory

Clover

Collard greens*

Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)*

Endive*

Escarole

Green peppers

Kale (!)*

Mint

Mustard greens*

Parsley*

Pea pods (the flat edible kind)*

Spearmint/Peppermint leaves

Radicchio

Radish tops

Raspberry leaves

Red or green leaf lettuce

Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf)*

Spinach (!)*

Turnip greens

Watercress*

Wheat grass

(!) = Use sparingly. High in either oxalates or goitrogens and may be toxic in accumulated quantities over a period of time.

What Should I Feed my Bunny?

by Dana Krempels, Ph.D.

The House Rabbit Society stresses that rabbits should live indoors, and have at least four hours of quality running/playing time per day. This, in conjunction with a proper diet, will help keep your rabbit happy, healthy and affectionate for a lifetime. Perhaps the most important items in the rabbit diet that ensure good intestinal health are (1) adequate oral hydration and (2) adequate crude long fiber, which helps push hair and food through the intestines, and keeps the intestinal muscles well toned and moving quickly. This is essential to the rabbit's maintenance of a balance flora (bacteria and yeast) in the cecum. Improper diet can quickly lead to intestinal problems, often originating with cecal dysbiosis, an imbalance of the natural "ecosystem" of the cecum.

Here are the most important items that you should be sure to include in your rabbit's diet.

HAY!

Perhaps the single most important item in the rabbit diet is grass HAY, and it should be fed in unlimited quantities to both adults and baby rabbits. A rabbit fed only commercial rabbit pellets does not get enough long fiber to keep the intestines in good working order. The long fibers in the hay push things through the gut and keep the intestinal muscles in good tone. In addition to keeping the intestinal contents moving at the rate at which nature intended, hay may also help prevent intestinal impactions caused by ingested hair or other indigestible items. (For more information on problems associated with slowed intestinal function, please see <http://www.bio.miami.edu/hare/ileus.html>)

Alfalfa or clover hays, although tasty for the rabbit, are too rich in protein and calcium to be fed ad libitum. Instead, offer fresh grass hays such as timothy, oat, coastal, brome, Bahia or wheat. If you can't find good quality hay locally, you may wish to mail order hay from Oxbow Hay Company or American Pet Diner. Oxbow carries the coarser "first cut" timothy hay that is higher in fiber. American Pet Diner carries both first cut and the softer, more fragrant "second cut". Second cut hay is lower in fiber, but some rabbits who refuse to eat the (putatively healthier) high-fiber first cut will often eagerly accept second cut hay. Less fiber is better than none at all!

PELLETS

A good-quality commercial rabbit pellet provides trace nutrients, vitamins and minerals that a rabbit might not get if fed only hay and fresh foods. However, very little pelleted food is required for good health. Many experienced rabbit veterinarians are now recommending no more than 1/8 cup of quality pellets per 5 lbs. of rabbit per day, and some even consider commercial pellets a "treat food" that can promote obesity in spayed/neutered adult rabbits. A rabbit fed too many pellets will often ignore his hay, to the detriment of his intestinal system!

A good quality rabbit pellet DOES NOT contain dried fruit, seeds, nuts, colored crunchy things or other things that are attractive to our human eyes, but very unhealthy to a rabbit. Rabbits are strict herbivores, and in nature they rarely get fruit, nuts or other such fatty, starchy foods. The complex flora of the cecum can quickly become dangerously imbalanced if too much simple, digestible carbohydrate is consumed—especially if the diet is generally low in fiber. The result is often "poopy butt syndrome," in which mushy fecal matter cakes onto the rabbit's behind. This a sign of cecal dysbiosis, which can foment much more serious health problems.

A good quality rabbit pellet should have at least 22% crude fiber, no more than approximately 14% protein, about 1% fat and about 1.0% calcium. Check the label on the rabbit pellets before you buy. Most commercial

pellets are alfalfa-based, which means they're higher in calories and lower in fiber than timothy-based pellets. The latter are available from quality feed companies such as Oxbow or American Pet Diner.

Baby rabbits may be fed unlimited pellets, as their bones and muscles need plenty of protein and calcium for proper growth. However, the calories and nutrients of commercial pellets fed ad libitum exceeds the needs of a healthy adult rabbit, and will not only promote obesity, but discourage the rabbit from consuming enough hay to ensure intestinal health.

The wise "bunny parent" will begin to gradually taper the quantity of pellets once the rabbit is about eight to twelve months old. and feed no more than 1/8 cup per day for every four pounds of rabbit (you can give a little bit more if the pellets are timothy-based). Some rabbit caregivers complain that their rabbits won't eat their hay. If the problem is not medical in nature (e.g., molar spurs and other dental problems are a common problem responsible for "picky eating"), then it may be that the rabbit is eating too many pellets, isn't hungry, and so doesn't eat the hay so vital to his/her health. Take the tough love approach! Cut back the pellets until you are sure your rabbit is eating enough hay.

FRESH VEGETABLES

You may have heard it from a breeder, pet store owner, or even a veterinarian who is not as familiar with recent rabbit health information as one might hope: Fresh vegetables will give your rabbit "diarrhea." Nothing could be further from the truth than this old myth. In fact, fresh greens help keep intestinal contents hydrated, which makes them easier for the bunny to pass. Trace nutrients, fiber, and just plain old tastiness are other benefits of fresh greens. After all, what do you suppose wild rabbits eat?

Fresh, moist greens are about as important as hay in maintaining a healthy intestine. Try broccoli, dark leaf lettuces, kale, parsley, carrots (with tops!), endive, escarole, dill, basil, mint, cilantro, culantro, spinach, tomato, celery (cut up into 1" pieces, to avoid problems with the tough strings getting stuck on the molars!). Almost any green, leafy vegetable that's good for you (including fresh-grown garden herbs such as tarragon and various mints, with the exception of Pennyroyal) are good for a rabbit. Experiment and see which types your rabbit likes best! Rabbits love fresh, fragrant herbs fresh from the garden.

Give starchy vegetables (e.g., carrots) in moderation, and use bits of fruit only in very, very small quantities, as special treats. Too much sugar and starch can cause cecal dysbiosis, and all its associated problems. Baby rabbits may start receiving greens very gradually at the age of about two months. Add one item at a time, in small amounts, and if you see no intestinal upset, add another. Carrots, romaine lettuce and kale are good starters. A five pound adult rabbit should receive at least four heaping cups of fresh, varied (at least three different kinds each day) vegetables per day. Be sure to wash everything thoroughly to remove pesticide and fertilizer residues as much as possible. Even organic produce should be washed well to remove potentially harmful bacteria, such as E. coli.

Serve the vegetables wet, as this will help increase your rabbit's intake of liquid. This helps keep the intestinal contents moving well, and the bunny healthy.

Please don't make the mistake of serving less-than-fresh vegetables to your rabbit. A rabbit is even more sensitive to spoiled food than a human is. If the vegetables smell stale or "on the fringe", they could make your bunny sick. Follow the Emerald Rule of Freshness when feeding your rabbit friend: "Don't Feed it to Your Bunny if You Wouldn't Eat it Yourself."

WATER

The importance of adequate water intake cannot be overstated. A rabbit who does not drink sufficient water will gradually begin to suffer desiccation of the intestinal contents. Skin tenting, a common method used by

veterinarians to gauge the state of hydration in many animals, is not a good gauge of hydration in rabbits. It seems that even when the tissues of the rabbit appear to be well-hydrated, the intestinal contents may not be, perhaps because the rabbit is so efficient at sequestering necessary fluids from its own intestine. When this happens, the ingested food in the stomach and intestine becomes dry and difficult for the normal muscular motions to push through. This can start a downhill cascade into a condition known as ileus, which can be life-threatening if not recognized and treated.

A rabbit will usually drink more water from a clean, heavy crock than from a sipper bottle. The rabbit caregiver may wish to provide both, but it's important to be sure that the crock, if porcelain, is lead free, and that the water is changed daily and the crock washed thoroughly with hot water and detergent to prevent bacterial growth in the water source.

FRESH FRUIT?

These are considered treats, and should be fed in very limited quantities (no more than two tablespoons a day for a five pound rabbit!), if at all. Safe choices are apple, apricot, banana, cherries, mango, peach, plum, papaya, pineapple, apricot, berries....just about any fruit you would like is okay for your bunny. Be very careful not to overdo these treat foods, as they may promote cecal dysbiosis, other intestinal problems and create a desire in the bunny to eat treats instead of his/her normal, healthy foods.

DON'T FEED POTENTIALLY HARMFUL "TREATS"

Remember: a rabbit is a lagomorph, not a rodent or a primate. The rabbit digestive tract is physiologically more similar to that of a horse than to that of a rodent or primate, and the intestine and related organs can suffer from an overindulgence in starchy, fatty foods.

NEVER feed your rabbit commercial "gourmet" or "treat" mixes filled with dried fruit, nuts and seeds. These may be safe for a bird or hamster—BUT THEY ARE NOT PROPER FOOD FOR A RABBIT. The sole function of "rabbit gourmet treats" is to lighten your wallet. If the manufacturers of "gourmet rabbit treats" truly cared about your rabbit's health and longevity, they would not market such products.

Don't feed your rabbit cookies, crackers, nuts, seeds, breakfast cereals (including oatmeal) or "high fiber" cereals. They may be high fiber for you, but not for your herbivorous rabbit, who's far better able to completely digest cellulose ("dietary fiber") than you are. Fed to a rabbit, the high fat and simple carbohydrate content of "naughty foods" may contribute to fatty liver disease, cecal dysbiosis, obesity, and otherwise cause health problems.

A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT CORN AND OTHER SEEDS

Some types of seeds (especially things like "Canadian peas" and corn kernels) have hulls that are indigestible to a rabbit, and can cause life-threatening intestinal impactions/blockages.

Corn, fresh or dried, is NOT safe for rabbits. The hull of corn kernels is composed of a complex polysaccharide (not cellulose and pectin, of which plant cell walls are more commonly composed, and which a rabbit can digest) which rabbits cannot digest. We know of more than one rabbit who suffered intestinal impactions because of the indigestible corn hulls. After emergency medical treatment, when the poor rabbits finally passed the corn, their fecal pellets were nearly solid corn hulls! Those rabbits were lucky.

Show your bunny how much you love him by providing him with a healthy diet. He'll reward you with long life, good health, and carrot-lip kisses.

Why Does My Bunny Do That?

Are you confused about why your rabbit acts the way he does? The following descriptions may help you understand your rabbit companion.

Begging: Begging is sooo cute and extremely hard to resist. Rabbits may press their nose through the cage wire or run circles around your feet if you are holding a banana. Some sit up on the toes of their rear feet, stretching towards the delightful smell that has caught their attention.

Rabbits are born with the knowledge that being cute will get them whatever they want. To accommodate the begging rabbit (and the rabbit owner's inability to resist), I recommend psychological treats. For instance, a 1/2-inch slice of carrot can be cut into four pieces and given to the rabbit at four different times throughout the day.

Chewing cords: There are several theories as to why rabbits are attracted to phone cords, antenna cords, cable TV cords, lamp cords, etc. One theory is that they are attracted by the vibration from the electricity. Another theory is that the electricity makes a noise that is audible to the rabbit. Or could it be that the plastic that encloses the electrical wires tastes good? Who's to know? Whatever the reason, it's simply not safe to leave a rabbit alone in a non-rabbit-proofed room.

Flexible plastic tubing (like that used in fish tanks, but a larger diameter) is one of the easiest ways to protect cords. The tubing can be sliced length-wise with a utility knife and the cord pushed inside. A few rabbits will continue to chew on the plastic tubing, but this provides the time necessary to let the rabbit know (by clapping or stomping along with a verbal NO) that it is not appropriate to chew on the tubing. The plastic tubing can be replaced, if necessary, since it's much easier to replace tubing than to find out that the only phone in the house has been suddenly disconnected. And, of course, the rabbit and the house could both burn down if an electrical short were to occur.

Chewing wood: For pure chewing enjoyment and immense pleasure, there's nothing better than a nice piece of soft wood to gnaw on...for some rabbits. Many of my rabbits aren't the least bit interested in a piece of plain old wood and many never gnaw. But most do love a good piece of apple tree twig and will gnaw the bark from the twig as though it were a delicious treat. (Caution: Not to be fed are branches from apricot, cherry, peach, plum and redwood trees, listed as toxic by poison centers.)

Gnawing is not necessary to keep their constantly growing teeth under control.* Some of my rabbits eat only Timothy hay and pellets, refusing all wood, and have perfectly good teeth. Gnawing seems to be more of a recreational activity than anything else, and attention can be diverted from a chair leg to an appropriate piece of wood or to a cardboard box by consistent and diligent action.

*An exception might be when a rabbit has a slight malocclusion. Often if you can encourage these rabbits to gnaw on wood or carrots, you can avoid clipping/filing teeth or perhaps lengthen the time between clipping.

Chinning: Claiming possessions is done by chinning. Rabbits use their chin (as cats used their foreheads) to mark objects with a scent that we humans are not able to detect. In addition to all of my furniture, rabbits have claimed my arms, face and shoes.

Circling: This often means it's time to be spayed or neutered. Circling is part of a rabbit's courting behavior and is sometimes accompanied by a soft honking or oinking. Circling can also be a way to ask for food or attention from human companions.

Dancing: The House Rabbit Handbook describes dancing as a "frolicking series of sideways kicks and mid-air leaps accompanied by a few head shakes and body gyrations." That pretty well sums it up. The bunny dance is something done to indicate happiness, contentment and a great frame of mind.

Don't touch my stuff: Rabbits are often displeased when you rearrange their cage as you clean. They are creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to stay that way.

Grunting: Grunts are often any reactions to a human behavior, or toward another rabbit. Watch out, or you could be bitten. However, I do have rabbits who grunt their disapproval when I pick them up or when I annoy them by touching their whiskers and that's the extent of their anger.

Lunging: This frequently occurs when you reach into the cage to clean, give food or to take the rabbit out. It also is a form of attack used against another rabbit. Getting the rabbit accustomed to whatever is occurring is the solution. In the meantime, I always place my hand on the rabbit's head while performing the task.

Playing: Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off the couch and act like a kid who's had too much sugar.

Pulling hair from chest or legs. Pseudo-pregnancy occurs in unsprayed females living with neutered males (or sprayed females living with unneutered males). These females will occasionally think that they are pregnant and may build nests. They may even stop eating as rabbits do the day before they give birth. I've not observed this when all rabbits who live together are neutered.

Shedding: Rabbits shed the same as do all animals with fur. From my experience here in the northwest, rabbits shed every three months. They have alternate heavy and light sheds. When people tell me that "my rabbit sheds all of the time," I know that they do not understand the importance of combing/bushing when each shed occurs. Generally it may take two weeks for a rabbit to complete his shed if the owner has combed and brushed the rabbit. Occasionally, a rabbit who will normally shed in about two weeks will shed for a longer period even with daily combing.

Sniffing: May be annoyed or just talking to you.

Spraying: Males who are not neutered will mark female rabbits in this manner, as well as their territory. Females may also spray.

Teeth grinding: This is a sign of contentment and happiness. It is a very light grinding sound and, when placing your hand on the side of her face, it will feel like a vibration from the molars. The eyes are often half closed.

Teeth chattering or crunching: This is much louder than teeth grinding and indicates pain. The rabbit often sits in a hunched up position with ears pressed against his body.

Territory droppings: Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered, are a sign of territoriality. This will often occur upon entrance into a new environment and is more persistent with unaltered rabbits. If another rabbit lives separately in the house this may always be a nuisance.

Throwing: Rabbits will throw anything that they can pick up with their teeth. Often owners complain about food and water bowls being turned upside down, causing a mess. A bowl is just another toy to a rabbit. Whether it's full or empty, if she decides to play and a bowl is available, she'll toss it. Bowls need to be the heavy ceramic type, or lighter bowls can be fastened to cages with a large clamp.

Thumping: "Thumper" of cartoon fame thumps many times in rapid succession before taking off for safety. That's not the way real rabbits thump. Rabbits stand on all four feet, in a somewhat tip-toe position, with their ears alert, then lift their rear feet and thump! to warn everyone in the warren (including humans) that there is "danger," in the rabbit's opinion. They may remain in the thumping posture until convinced that the danger is gone. The length of time between thumps can vary from a few seconds to a couple of minutes and may last an extended period of time (even an hour or more). This "danger" could be a furnace, refrigerator or other electrical appliance turning on or a lit cigarette when they are not used to the smoke. "Danger" could be the shadow of a bird flying across the moon or a cat walking on the window sill chasing a shadow on the floor.

Thumping can occur day or night and is the rabbit's attempt to save everyone from a terrible fate.

A rabbit who is exhibiting continual thumping can die from fright and should be reassured and comforted as soon as possible.

As an expression of anger, I am sometimes given a thump when I return a rabbit to his cage after an exercise period. He either doesn't want to return (thump!) or would rather do it himself (thump!). When not at all pleased with what has just happened, a thump is often in order. For instance, when he thinks he should have another piece of fruit, and instead, I eat it myself (thump!).

by Sandi Ackerman, HRS Educator & Washington State Chapter Manager

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Chewing Behavior

by Holly O'Meara

Why does your rabbit chew things other than her meals? Chewing is a normal, natural, necessary—and highly enjoyable—activity for rabbits. Here is an outline of some considerations to help you understand the why of chewing, as well as the how of preventing destruction of your favorite wicker furniture.

I. Psychological factors

A. Sex. Females often have a stronger urge to burrow than males, although this is not the only reason rabbits chew. The hormone/age factors below also apply to males. Both males and females can and should be spayed or neutered as soon as they are sexually mature (3 1/2 to 6 mos. old).

B. Hormone/age. Is she spayed? If young (under 2 yrs.) & unspayed, spay her. If young & spayed, her chewing will lessen with time. If mature (over 2 yrs.) & unspayed, spay her but get a checkup first. If mature & spayed, her behavior isn't governed by hormones.

C. Personality. Chewers are often intelligent, outgoing & affectionate individuals who like to be in charge and get lots of attention. Does she chew to get attention? Would a companion alleviate boredom? Anything that would entertain her/make her happier might lessen her chewing.

II. Environmental factors

A. Diversions: keep trying to find something harmless she enjoys doing. What kind of "burrow" (such as a cardboard box stuffed with hay), can you provide for her?

B. Protecting the environment: A box or wire basket can go over a group of wires. Browse a large hardware store for products to use for bunnyproofing. You can also try spraying Bitter Apple on non-chewables.

C. Confinement (to a cage or room). This simply buys you time, while you bunny-proof, get her spayed, or wait for her to mature.

Remember: A spayed rabbit will chew less and less as she matures. It may be just a matter of riding out a high energy stage of your bunny's life.

FAQ: Toys

Why is it important to provide toys?

Toys are important because they provide:

Mental stimulation. Without challenging activities to occupy your rabbit when you're not home, your rabbit, especially a solitary rabbit, will get bored. This could lead to depression and/or excessive destruction. The creative use of toys can extend your rabbit's life by keeping him interested in his surroundings, by giving him the freedom to interact with those surroundings, and by allowing him to constantly learn and grow.

Physical exercise. Your rabbit needs safe activities to keep her body in shape as well as her mind. She needs things to climb on, crawl under, hop on and around, dig into, and chew on. Without outlets for these physical needs, your rabbit may become fat or depressed, or may create jumping, chewing, or crawling diversions with your furniture.

Bunny proofing for your home. As is clear from the above descriptions, toys are not just for your rabbit, they also keep your house safe. By providing your rabbit with a selection of toys chosen to meet her age, sex, reproductive status and temperament, you have fulfilled most of the requirements of bunnyproofing your home.

What are good bunny toys?

If you find your rabbit ingesting plastic or cardboard toys, switch to a different type of toy that the rabbit is not interested in eating.

Some good toys to start with:

- Paper Bags and Cardboard boxes for crawling inside, scratching, and chewing.
Bunnies like them much more when there are at least two entry points into the boxes.

Chris Rosenzweig has some *Great Tips on Building Bunny Box Toys*:

- Cardboard concrete forms for burrowing
- Cardboard roll from paper towels or toilet paper
- Untreated wicker baskets or boxes full of: shredded paper, junk mail, magazines, straw, or other organic materials for digging
- Yellow Pages for shredding
- Cat toys: Batta balls, and other cat toys that roll or can be tossed
- Parrot toys that can be tossed, or hung from the top of the cage and chewed or hit
- Baby toys: hard plastic (not teething) toys like rattles and keys, things that can be tossed
- Children's or birds' mobiles for hitting
- "Lazy cat lodge" (cardboard box with ramps and windows) to climb in and chew on.
Also, kitty condos, tubes, tunnels, and trees
- Nudge and roll toys like large rubber balls, empty Quaker Oat boxes and small tins
- "Busy Bunny" toys
- Plastic Rainbow slinkies

- Toys with ramps and lookouts for climbing and viewing the world
- Dried out pine cones
- Jungle gym type toys from Toys R Us
- A (straw) whisk broom
- A hand towel for bunching and scooting
- Untreated wood, twigs and logs that have been aged for at least 3 months. Apple tree branches can be eaten fresh off the tree. Stay away from: cherry, peach, apricot, plum and redwood, which are all poisonous.
- Untreated sea grass or maize mats from Pier One or Cost Plus
- Things to jump up on (they like to be in high places)
- Colorful, hard plastic caps from laundry detergent and softener bottles. They have great edges for picking up with their teeth, make a nice “ponk” sound when they collide, and the grip ridges molded into the plastic make a neat “rachety” sound when rabbits dig at the cap. The caps are nice for human-stacks-on-floor and bun-knocks-down kind of games.

Note: Be sure not to choose caps from caustic material bottles (e.g. drain uncloggers, bathroom cleaner bottles) since a residue of the cleaner might remain no matter how much washing off you do.



Local Rabbit-Savvy Veterinarians

Manhattan

Deborah Levison, DVM

Symphony Veterinary Center
170 West 96th Street
New York, NY 10025
(212) 866-8000
www.symphonyvet.com

Katherine Quesenberry, DVM

The Animal Medical Center
510 East 62nd St.
New York, NY 10065
(212) 838-7053 (212) 329-8622
www.amcny.org/avian-exotic-pets

Alexandra Wilson, DVM

The Center for Avian and Exotic Medicine
568 Columbus Ave.
New York, NY 10024
(212) 501-8750
<https://avianandexoticvets.com>

Westchester County

Gil Stanzione, DVM

381 Dobbs Ferry Road
White Plains, NY 10607
(914) 421-0020
<https://dakotaveterinarycenter.com>

Laurie Hess, DVM

Veterinary Center for Birds and Exotics
709 Bedford Road
Bedford Hills, NY 10507
(914) 861-1414
<https://avianexoticvet.com>

Long Island

Jennifer Saver, DVM and Laura George, DVM

Catnip & Carrots Veterinary Hospital
2056 Jericho Turnpike
New Hyde Park, NY 11040
(516) 877-7080
www.catnipandcarrots.com

Heidi Hoefler, DVM

Island Exotic Vet Care
591 East Jericho Turnpike
Huntington Station, NY 11746
(631) 424-0300
<http://heidihoefer.com>

Jeff Rose, DVM

Jefferson Animal Hospital
606 Patchogue Rd. (Route 112)
Port Jefferson Station, NY 11776
(631) 473-0415
<https://portjeffersonanimalhospital.com>

Sachar Malka, DVM

333 Great Neck Road
Great Neck, NY 11021
(516) 482-1101
www.birdexoticvet.com

New Jersey

Tracey Cantamessa, DVM

Eagle Rock Veterinary Hospital
612 Eagle Rock Ave.
West Orange, NJ 07052
(973) 736-1555
www.eaglerockvethosp.com

Christopher F. Stancel, DVM

Dog, Cat, and Bird Clinic of Nutley
324 Passaic Ave.
Nutley, NJ 07110
(973) 661-0441
www.dogcatbird.net

Help! My bunny's sick and I can't reach my vet!

by Mary E. Cotter, Ed. D., in consultation with Gil Stanzione, D.V.M.



I. Broken or bleeding toenails

If your bunny has broken a nail, or if you have cut too close to the blood vessel, apply pressure with a clean towel for a couple of minutes, til the bleeding stops. If you like, you can use styptic powder (available in drug stores), plain flour, or even a bar of soap rubbed on the end of the nail to help stop the bleeding. If the nail breaks off right at the base, clean the area thoroughly with Nolvasan (you can get it through your vet), and apply a thin coat of regular triple antibiotic ointment, such as Neosporin (not Neosporin Plus, or any other product that contains cortisone!!!) Try to keep your bunny in as clean an environment as possible til you can see your vet -- to prevent dirt from contaminating the injury site. Be sure to see your vet for followup care to this second kind of break, since bacterial infection can travel to the bone and cause serious problems.

II. Broken bones

Take your bunny to any emergency clinic, so that the bone can be stabilized til you can see your regular rabbit vet. If the emergency clinic needs to anesthetize your bunny to do xrays or to stabilize the leg, isoflurane is the preferred anesthesia for rabbits. If you cannot get to an emergency clinic, do your best to severely restrict your bunny's movement til you can get to your vet. This will help to prevent further injury. Make sure your bunny has easy access to food and water so that he does not have to move around to get to it.

III. Runny eyes

Runny eyes do not usually constitute an emergency, but if your rabbit sustains trauma to the eye, resulting in a serious corneal scratch or ulcer, you should get veterinary treatment as soon as possible. If you can get to a veterinary emergency clinic, the eye can be stained to assess the damage, and the emergency vet can administer antibiotic drops (usually tribiotic ophthalmic drops) or ointment, to tide you over til you can see you own vet. Do not put any medication into your bunny's eye unless it is given to you by a qualified vet for that purpose. Many people attempt to treat their rabbits' eyes with leftover dog/cat/human drugs, often with disastrous consequences. If your bunny's eye is oozing or sticky (often appearing "glued shut"), you can use warm compresses to loosen the gunk and clean the external area around the eye. Bunnies are usually very appreciative of this effort, and will often tilt their heads to "cooperate" with you.

IV. Anorexia

The most common causes of anorexia are: 1) teeth problems, 2) gas pain, 3) gastrointestinal problems. When you cannot reach your vet, you can attempt to differentiate the cause of your bunny's anorexia by carefully watching his behavior.

a. Teeth problems

Your bunny approaches food -- maybe even picks it up and starts to eat it -- but then backs off or drops the food without finishing it. He seems hungry, but unable or unwilling to eat -- even treats. His activity level is more or less normal. When you rub his cheeks, you might see a pain response from spurs on his upper molars. If the problem is not accurately diagnosed and corrected soon, your bunny may start to exhibit symptoms of gas pain or gastrointestinal problems (see below) -- simply from not eating normally.

What you can do until you get to your vet:

You can force-feed him (canned pumpkin, baby-food veggies, mixed, if possible, with ground pellets or "pellet dust") by using a feeding syringe. You can give him subcutaneous fluids. If he develops gas from not eating properly, follow the suggestions below.

b. Gas pain

Your bunny is sitting hunched and still. In some instances, he may stretch out fully, giving the appearance that he is trying to press his belly to the floor. You offer him treats, and he is totally uninterested. Sometimes (though not always) you can hear very loud "gurgling" sounds coming from his belly -- even from across the room. In fact, his gut sounds, heard through a stethoscope, can be deafening. You may hear loud tooth grinding -- a sure sign of pain (this sounds quite different from the soft grinding that indicates pleasure; it can sometimes be heard clear across a room). His stomach may (or may not) feel overly-stretched and taut. A bunny with gas pain often has a low body temperature (e.g. 97; normal is 101-103).

What you can do until you get to your vet:

Take his temperature!! If his temp is lower than normal, warm him up! You can do this by offering him a wrapped hot-water bottle or a heating pad, set on low -- as long as the wire is well-protected so he cannot chew it, and as long as he can easily move off the heating pad if he gets too warm. (WARNING: Heating pads can cause severe burns and injury when misused. Some vets, who see these injuries frequently, discourage the use of heating pads altogether for this reason. Do not use any setting other than "low" for your rabbit. The pad may not feel warm to you, but it will to your rabbit!!) You can also warm him with your own body heat: hold him in your arms, close to your body, for extended periods of time (an hour, or even longer). Give him Phazyme (pediatric simethicone) -- two or three 1-cc doses, one hour apart. Give him frequent and long (10 - 15 mins., or as long as he will tolerate) tummy massages, at least part of which can be with his hindquarters raised. Take his temperature periodically to monitor the effects of your efforts to warm him. Whatever else you do, fuss over him. There is ample anecdotal evidence (from many HRS fosterers and others) to suggest that bunnies who are "fussed over" do better than those who are not. You can also give subcutaneous fluids, as instructed by your vet -- around 30 cc for a two pound rabbit, 50cc for a four pound rabbit -- two or three times a day -- til you can get to your vet. Sub-Q fluids will help to keep him well-hydrated. You can warm the sub-Q fluids by putting the bag into a pan of water, bringing the water to a boil, and "cooking" the fluid bag for several minutes. Test the temperature on your wrist before administering the fluids. Lukewarm is best.

c. Gastrointestinal problems

Very similar in presentation to gas pain: your bunny sits in a "bread-loaf" position, unwilling to eat and often unwilling to move. His fecal production will change: his stool will become much smaller in size or he will stop producing stool altogether. His body temperature will usually drop. There may be either loud gut sounds, or an almost total absence of gut sounds through a stethoscope.

What you can do until you get to your vet:

Follow suggestions for addressing gas pain (above): warmth, belly massage, gas-relief if necessary, subcutaneous fluids. For further information, please read the document on GI stasis available at:
<http://fig.cox.miami.edu/Faculty/Dana/ileus.html>

WARNING: If there is any chance your bunny has a GI blockage, do not attempt to force-feed him! This will only make the problem worse. Your most important job is to monitor his body temperature, and to keep him as comfortable and as well-hydrated as you can til you can see your regular bunny vet.

V. Head tilt

Your bunny loses his balance, and his head starts twisting toward the ceiling; he looks like something out of "The Exorcist." He is dizzy, unable to regain coordination. If he tries to walk or hop, he falls over and starts rolling around. In some cases, his eyes dart back and forth very rapidly, and the iris appears to be almost "vibrating."

What you can do until you get to your vet:

PAD YOUR BUNNY'S ENVIRONMENT!!! Your main job til you can get to your vet is to prevent your bunny from hurting himself while he's seriously uncoordinated and/or rolling. Prepare a box (or other carefully restricted environment) for him, thickly padded with towels or fake sheepskin. The idea is to provide him with a totally cushioned and absorptive environment that will restrict his rolling and uncontrolled movements til he can get full treatment. A head-tilt presentation can be very frightening for owners. Many dog-and-cat vets will tell you that a head-tilt bunny should simply be euthanized. The experience of many excellent rabbit vets, however, has shown that, with a dedicated owner (treatment may extend over a period of months) and a bunny who is a "fighter," head tilt can be treated very satisfactorily, and many (if not most) bunnies can make a full, or close-to-full, recovery. NB: Head-tilt bunnies often continue to have lusty appetites, but their lack of coordination makes it very difficult for them to eat or drink. Help your bunny to eat or drink in any way you can: hold the water bottle near his mouth, or carefully syringe water into him through the side of his mouth (watching to make sure he is not aspirating it!), hold his food (vegetables, hay) for him, and offer it piece by piece, etc.

VI. Severe diarrhea

"Diarrhea" is not the same thing as soft, mushy stool, that sticks to a bunny's butt (this is usually excess cecal production). It is brown, watery discharge, which is often profuse. The bunny may be limp and very weak. Because it causes such rapid dehydration, diarrhea can be life threatening. If you can get to a veterinary emergency clinic, your bunny can receive subcutaneous fluids. If there is no such clinic near you, please ask your vet now -- before an emergency arises -- to teach you how to administer fluids at home. This kind of diarrhea is generally the result of parasites (coccidia) or inappropriate antibiotics administered by well-meaning (but not well-informed) vets. See your own rabbit-savvy vet as soon as possible for proper diagnosis and followup treatment.

VII. Bites

Bunnies often inflict serious bites on one another, if they are not properly "bonded." Bacteria introduced into the bite wound can travel through the bloodstream and "seed" other body areas, eventually producing abscesses. For this reason, you should definitely ask you vet to check any but the most superficial bites. **WHAT YOU CAN DO TIL YOU GET TO YOUR VET:** If there is serious bleeding, apply pressure til a clot forms. Gently wash the area around the bite wound with Nolvasan (chlorhexidine) solution. Apply a very thin layer of regular Neosporin (triple antibiotic ointment); do not use Neosporin Plus! If the bites are extensive, try to get to an emergency veterinary service. The emergency vet can clean and dress the wounds. Most bunny bite wounds can be treated by shaving the hair and applying topical ointment and dressing until you can see your regular vet. If the emergency vet feels systemic antibiotics should be administered because of the extent of the bites, make sure that oral penicillins and derivatives (such as amoxicillin) are not used. Micotil and cephalosporins should also be avoided. Some bunny-friendly antibiotics: Baytril (and other fluoroquinolones, such as Orbax, Dicural, Ciprofloxacin, Maxaquin), Trimethoprim Sulfa (aka: Sulfatrim, Bactrim, Tribriksen, TMP-SMZ), chloramphenicol (take extreme care not to touch it when administering it; it can cause aplastic anemia in some people), Gentocin (and other aminoglycosides -- though these need to be used carefully to prevent ear and kidney damage). Although penicillin is not ordinarily a drug of first choice for most bunny ailments, injectable Pen-G Procaine can be very useful for specific kinds of problems.

VII. Sudden fever

If your bunny spikes a sudden, very high fever (we have seen fevers as high as 106 or 107 -- literally off most thermometers), cool him down by swabbing his ears with alcohol or wet-towel-wrapped ice cubes. You can also dip your fingers into ice water, and gently stroke his ears for several minutes at a time. Try to get his temperature down to around 104 (normal is 101-103), i.e., a fever that is useful to his body, rather than harmful. Extra cooling can be achieved by taking chilled cans or frozen vegetable boxes from your refrigerator, wrapping them in towels, and packing them around your bunny. Administer subcutaneous fluids as soon as possible, as instructed by your vet. See your vet, ASAP, for a thorough examination, diagnosis, and followup.

IX. Heat stroke

Cool your bunny as above, and administer sub-Q fluids as instructed by your vet. See your vet ASAP.

9 REASONS TO KEEP YOUR BUNNY INDOORS

- 1)** Outdoor rabbits are exposed to extremes of weather: heat, cold, thunder, lightning, high winds (which can damage or destroy housing). Of these, heat is particularly dangerous: rabbits succumb very quickly to high temperatures, and need to be kept cool in the summer. In extremely cold weather, drinking water freezes and rabbits can become dehydrated.
- 2)** Outdoor rabbits are prone to insect/tick bites and fly strike (flies laying eggs on the rabbit and the larvae burrow into the rabbit's flesh).
- 3)** Outdoor rabbits are exposed to parasites and diseases carried by other animals; e.g., raccoons carry *Baylisascaris procyonis*, which rabbits can pick up on the ground and ingest (by grooming their feet), and which can then migrate to the rabbit's brain, where it is fatal.
- 4)** Outdoor rabbits often become the victims of poisoning from pesticides, herbicides, and/or fertilizers. Even if your neighbor uses them, rain will wash the chemicals onto your property. In many areas, ground and air spraying of toxic chemicals is used because of the threat of West Nile Virus.
- 5)** Outdoor rabbits often are often neglected or forgotten once the novelty wears off. Their food and water may become infested with insects, bacteria, or molds. They do not get the human interaction they need in order to develop trust, and often become extremely hard to handle as a result.
- 6)** Outdoor rabbits are "out of sight," if not "out of mind," and this makes it almost impossible for owners to become adequately familiar with their bunny's "normal behaviors." When you are not thoroughly familiar with your bunny's normal behaviors, it is difficult to recognize subtle signs of illness/injury in time to prevent emergency visits.
- 7)** Outdoor rabbits experience fear from unfamiliar sounds, from which they cannot escape (e.g., lawnmowers, leaf/snow blowers, tree chopping), smells, unfamiliar visitors (e.g. neighborhood children, passersby, etc.).
- 8)** Outdoor rabbits often become the victims of predators (dogs, cats, hawks, raccoons, snakes), and can suffer fatal heart attacks from even the approach of a predator.
- 9)** Outdoor rabbits (especially those housed in hutches) often get little or no exercise. Rabbits that are let loose in a yard for exercise face all of the above dangers, as well as road hazards and the risk of getting lost if they escape from the yard.



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Did you know?

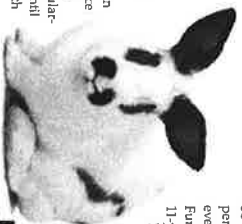
Rabbits make great housepets.



Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate, inquisitive individuals. Their personalities range from bold to timid, gentle to rambunctious, and all points in between.

Rabbits can be litterbox trained.

Providing a litterbox with organic litter topped with hay in the corner of the rabbit's space is the best way to train a rabbit. Once he is going to the box regularly, his space can be expanded until he is free-ranging in an area with one or two litterboxes.



Rabbits are better pets for adults than for children.

Rabbits are not for everyone. The ideal "rabbit person" is a quiet, gentle individual who is eager to get to know rabbits on their own terms. Noisy households and people who are looking for something they can carry in their arms and cuddle for hours and hours are likely to be disappointed by the subtle nature of the rabbit personality. The natural exuberance and deep level of even the gentlest young child is stressful for rabbits. Further, children's interests change very rapidly; your 11-year-old may be 21 by the time your bunny lives out his life. When adopting a rabbit, families with children should ensure that an adult will be the rabbit's primary caretaker and can make a long-term commitment to the rabbit's well-being.

Rabbits should live indoors.

Rabbits are prey animals. Even the most urban areas are rife with predators, including raccoons, feral cats, and dogs. Domestic rabbits who are kept outdoors are also subject to fleas, ticks, parasites, extremes of weather, and neglect by their caretakers ("out of sight, out of mind")—all of which can dramatically shorten their lifespans.

Rabbits need more than just rabbit pellets for their diet.

The primary component of a mature rabbit's diet should be good-quality grass hay, such as timothy, brome, or orchard grass. Fresh water and fresh, leafy greens should be given daily. Commercial rabbit pellets, as well as treats (such as fresh fruit), should be given only in limited quantities.

Most rabbits don't like to be picked up and carried around.

As ground-loving creatures, rabbits feel most comfortable on the floor. Rabbits can be taught to accept routine handling, but there is nothing abnormal about a bunny who prefers to sit beside you rather than on your lap.

Rabbits should be spayed or neutered.

Spaying/neutering prolongs a rabbit's life and prevents or solves many behavioral problems, such as

destructive house soiling, chewing and digging, and aggressiveness.

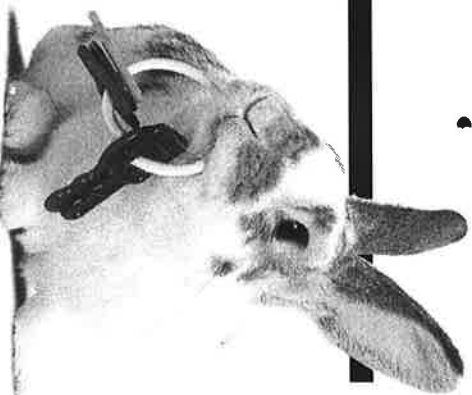
Unspayed females face a very high risk of developing uterine tumors by the time they're three years of age.

Rabbits can live 10 years or more.

A spayed/neutered indoor rabbit can live a much longer, much healthier life than his outdoor and wild brethren.

Rabbits need a stimulating environment and like to explore by chewing.

For their physical and emotional well-being, rabbits should be given lots of chew toys made of wood, cardboard, wicker, and paper, as well as toys to climb on and toss. Because rabbits are chewers by nature, their play-area should be carefully rabbit-proofed.



Rabbits need to see specially trained veterinarians.

Most general veterinarians are not rabbit-savvy, and it can be hard to find a skilled rabbit practitioner.

Rabbits should be adopted from a shelter or rescue group, rather than bought from a breeder or a pet store.

As their popularity increases, rabbits are paying the same price as other companion animals: every year, thousands of adoptable bunnies are euthanized simply because there are more rabbits available than there are responsible humans to care for them.



Ask us about adopting a rescued rabbit!



Courtesy House Rabbit Society, www.rabbit.org and Humana Graphics. Photos by Ken Mark and Mary Carter. House Rabbit Society is an international, volunteer-based non-profit organization with two primary goals: to rescue abandoned rabbits and find permanent homes for them, and to educate the public and assist human societies through publications on rabbit care, phone consultation, and classes upon request. To find your closest HRS representative, visit www.rabbit.org. Printing provided by Oxford Rd. Products, www.oxfordrdsystem.com.





BACKGROUND

SIZE: 2 to 20+ pounds, depending on breed

LIFESPAN: 7 to 10+ years

COST PER YEAR: \$730

GOOD WITH KIDS?: Because rabbits are physically delicate and require specialized veterinary care, they are not appropriate for families with young children.

FUN FACT: Rabbits can be trained to use a litterbox and will come when called—yours may even play tag with you!

WHERE TO GET A RABBIT: There are many rabbits available for adoption at shelters and small-animal rescue groups. Call your local shelter and visit websites like www.petfinder.com and www.rabbit.org.

FOOD

- The most important component of your rabbit's diet is grass hay, such as timothy, which keeps the intestinal tract healthy. Unlimited hay should always be available.
- You may wish to supplement with good-quality rabbit pellets (18% fiber). Until your pet is fully grown at around 6 months, he can have unlimited pellets; after that, limit pellets to 1/8-1/4 cup per 6 pounds of bunny. Frail, older bunnies may need more to keep weight up; ask your veterinarian.
- Feed your pet fresh, leafy greens daily, such as dark lettuces, collard greens, turnip greens and carrot tops. We suggest a minimum of 2 cups per 6 pounds of rabbit.
- Clean, fresh water, dispensed in a bottle or sturdy bowl, should be available 24/7.

CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Where's the only place for your rabbit's cage? **INDOORS!** Rabbits are highly social, and do best when they have plenty of interaction with family members. Outdoors, they face the threat of attacks from other animals and inclement weather.
- Rabbits should not be housed with other rabbits unless all are spayed/neutered and have been carefully introduced on neutral territory.
- The minimum recommended cage length for one rabbit is 3 to 4 feet, but bigger is always better!
- We recommend a solid-bottom metal cage, large dog crate or puppy exercise pen. Wire-bottom cages can ulcerate a rabbit's feet. If you do use a wire cage, cover the bottom with wood, towels or carpeting.

BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Rabbits are prey animals and timid by nature, so be patient if your pet seems shy at first. Hand-feeding treats is a nice way to get acquainted.
- Pick up your rabbit by supporting his forequarters with one hand and his hindquarters with the other. Handle with care—an accidental drop can result in broken legs and back!
- **NEVER** pick up a rabbit by the ears or scruff—this can cause very serious injury.

LITTER TRAINING

- Clean by nature, most rabbits will choose one corner of the cage as a bathroom. As soon as your rabbit's choice is clear, put a newspaper-lined litter box in that corner; cover the bottom with hay or pelleted litter.
- Never use pine or cedar shavings as litter, as the fumes can make your pet sick. Clay cat litter can cause respiratory or gastrointestinal problems.

EXERCISE & TOYS

- Your rabbit needs exercise out of his cage in a safe area—indoors or outdoors—for several hours **EVERY** day. Your pet is designed for running & jumping!
- Rabbit-proof an indoor area by covering all electrical wires, phone, computer and TV cables, and anything else your rabbit is likely to chew, such as houseplants.
- Outdoor play areas should be fully enclosed by a fence. Never leave your pet unsupervised outdoors—even for a few minutes. Rabbits can quickly dig under fences.
- Your pet needs toys to satisfy his natural urges to dig and chew. Safe chew toys include cardboard boxes, an old telephone directory and commercially made chew sticks. Your bunny would love a digging box, such as a cardboard box filled halfway with soil or shredded paper.

DAILY CARE

- Rabbits can be messy, so clean your pet's cage once or twice weekly. Put your pet in a safe room or alternate cage when you sweep out the cage and scrub it with warm, soapy water.
- Change your rabbit's litter box daily.
- Brush your pet regularly with a soft brush to remove excess hair.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your bunny to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly veterinarian visit if you think your pet is sick! If your rabbit stops eating or moving his bowels for 6 hours or longer, or has watery diarrhea, seek help immediately. Other signs that something isn't right include runny nose & eyes, dark red urine, lethargy and fur loss.
- Rabbits should be spayed or neutered by a veterinarian experienced with rabbit surgeries. This prevents unwanted litters, spraying in males and uterine cancer in females. Visit www.rabbit.org for a list of veterinarians.

IF YOU THINK THAT YOUR PET MAY HAVE INGESTED A POTENTIALLY POISONOUS SUBSTANCE, CALL THE ASPCA ANIMAL POISON CONTROL CENTER AT (888) 426-4435

A \$65 consultation fee may be applied to your credit card

RABBIT SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- ✓ Solid-bottom cage or large dog crate *or pen*
- ✓ Carrier
- ✓ Litter box with hay or pelleted litter
- ✓ Grass hay and hay rack
- ✓ Good-quality rabbit pellets
- ✓ Sturdy ceramic or metal food bowl
- ✓ Ceramic water bowl or water bottle that attaches to cage
- ✓ Grooming brush
- ✓ Digging box and safe chew toys



The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

424 East 92nd Street, New York, NY 10128-6804
212-876-7700 • www.aspcas.org

Responsibility involves providing proper housing, nutrition, grooming and veterinary care

Domestic rabbits are delightful companion animals. They are inquisitive, intelligent, sociable and affectionate, and well-cared-for indoor rabbits can live for 7 to 10+ years. Adopting a rabbit, therefore, is a long term commitment.

Rabbits and Children

Our culture is so filled with images of children and rabbits together (the Easter Bunny, Peter Rabbit, etc.) that many parents see rabbits as low-maintenance starter pets for kids. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rabbits are physically delicate and fragile, and require specialized veterinary care.

Children are naturally energetic and loving. But "loving" to a small child means holding, cuddling, or carrying an animal around — precisely the things that frighten most rabbits. Rabbits can't cry out when distressed. Instead they may start to scratch or bite to protect themselves from well-meaning children. Thousands are abandoned to animal shelters for this reason. Many rabbits are also dropped accidentally by children, resulting in broken legs and backs. While rabbits may be appropriate family companions, an adult should be the primary caretaker.

Housing and Exercise

Many people think that rabbits don't require much room for housing or exercise. Not so! Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need plenty of out-of-cage exercise time, as well as a cage that allows them to move freely. The minimum recommended cage space for a single rabbit is 2' x 2' x 4'. Although wire-bottom cages are common, they can ulcerate a rabbit's feet. If you have a wire cage, cover the bottom with a piece of wood or corrugated cardboard. Better yet, buy a cage with a floor.

Your rabbit needs a safe exercise area with ample room to run and jump, either indoors or out. Any outdoor area should be fully enclosed by a fence. Never leave a rabbit unsupervised outdoors — even for a few minutes! Cats, dogs and even predatory birds can easily get around fencing material. Also, rabbits can dig under fences and get lost.

You can rabbit-proof an indoor area by covering all electrical wires and anything else your rabbit is likely to chew. Recommended exercise time for indoor rabbits is several hours per day.

Diet

- The most important component of your rabbit's diet is grass hay (such as Timothy or Brome), which keeps the intestinal tract healthy; feed it free-choice, daily.
- In addition to hay, rabbits are also fed commercial rabbit pellets and fresh, dark-green leafy vegetables. Until they are fully grown (around 6 months), rabbits can have all the pellets they want. After that, assuming the animal is also getting hay and vegetables, pellets should be limited to 1/8 to 1/4 cup per day per 5 lbs. body weight. Pellets should be fresh and plain, without seeds, nuts or colored tidbits.
- Fresh water (bottle or bowl) should always be available.

Litter Training

Rabbits are very clean by nature, and will do their best to keep their living quarters clean. Most rabbits will choose one corner of the cage as their bathroom. As soon as your rabbit's choice is clear, put a newspaper-lined litter box in that corner; fill it with Timothy hay (or any other grass hay — not alfalfa). Pelleted-newspaper litters are also acceptable. If the litter box is changed daily, your rabbit's home will stay fresh and odor-free. Don't use pine or cedar shavings! The fumes may affect your rabbit's liver enzymes, which can cause problems if the animal needs anesthesia for surgery. Avoid using clay cat litters (both clumping and non-clumping); these may result in respiratory or gastrointestinal problems.

Indoors or Outdoors?

Many people think an outdoor hutch is the best way to keep a domestic rabbit. Rabbits, however, are highly social animals, and a backyard hutch forces them to live in unnatural isolation. Furthermore, rabbits can die of heart attacks from the very *approach* of a predator or vandal. Domestic rabbits do best indoors where they have plenty of interaction with family members.

Handling and General Care

- Pick up your rabbit by supporting his forequarters with one hand and his hindquarters with the other—failure to do so can result in spinal injuries to the rabbit. Never pick up a rabbit by his ears; this can cause very serious injury.
- Brush your rabbit regularly with a soft brush to remove excess hair and keep his coat in good condition. Ask your veterinarian how to clip your rabbit's nails.
- Rabbits should be spayed or neutered by a veterinarian experienced with rabbit surgeries. Spaying or neutering prevents breeding, spraying (males) and uterine cancer (females). To find a qualified rabbit veterinarian, search the House Rabbit Society web page at www.rabbit.org.
- Rabbits should not be housed with other rabbits unless all are spayed/neutered and they are introduced in neutral territory under careful supervision. Introductions are often difficult and injuries can result.
- If your rabbit stops eating or moving his bowels for 12 hours or longer or has watery diarrhea, seek expert veterinary care *immediately*.

Written for the ASPCA by Mary E. Cotter, Ed.D., Licensed Educator, House Rabbit Society

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- House Rabbit Society, Box 1201, Alameda, CA 94601, (510) 521-4631, www.rabbit.org
- "House Rabbit Handbook"; Marinell Harriman; 3rd ed., Drollery Press; Alameda, CA; 1995.
- "Rabbits"; Michaela Miller; Heinemann Interactive Library; Chicago, IL; 1998.
- "ASPCA Pet Care Guides for Kids — Rabbit"; Mark Evans; Dorling Kindersley; London, England, 1992.
- In case of accidental poisoning, call the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center 24-Hour Emergency Hotline: (888) 4ANI-HELP (426-4435). A consultation fee applies.

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9 COMMON RABBIT MYTHS

<p>Myth 1: Rabbits are great, low-maintenance starter pets.</p>	<p>Reality: Although they don't need to be walked like dogs, rabbits are anything but low-maintenance. Their quarters need daily cleaning, and fresh food and water must be offered daily, including a salad of well-washed, dark-green leafy vegetables. Certain rabbit health problems can become chronic and can require regular (and sometimes expensive) veterinary treatment. To complicate the picture, veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine are often hard to find.</p>
<p>Myth 2: Rabbits only live a year or two, so no long commitment is necessary.</p>	<p>Reality: Well cared-for indoor rabbits can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is approximately the same life span as some breeds of dogs, and requires the same long-term commitment.</p>
<p>Myth 3: Rabbits do not need veterinary care the way dogs and cats do.</p>	<p>Reality: Although rabbits in the USA do not require annual vaccinations, nevertheless, regular veterinary checkups help to detect small problems before they become big ones. Companion rabbits should be spayed/neutered by veterinarians experienced in rabbit surgery. This not only reduces hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing, but also protects females from the risk of uterine cancer, the incidence of which can exceed 50% as rabbits grow older.</p>
<p>Myth 4: Rabbits are happiest outdoors in a backyard hutch.</p>	<p>Reality: Rabbits kept outdoors in hutches are often forgotten and neglected once the initial novelty wears off. Far too frequently, they are relegated to a life of "solitary confinement" and are subject to extremes of weather, as well as to diseases spread by fleas, ticks, flies, and mosquitoes all of which can adversely affect their health and their life span. They can die of heart attacks from the very approach of a predator – even if the rabbit is not attacked or bitten. Rabbits are gregarious creatures who enjoy social contact with their human caretakers. The easiest way to provide social stimulation for a companion rabbit is to house him indoors, as a member of the family.</p>
<p>Myth 5: Rabbits are rather dirty, and have a strong odor.</p>	<p>Reality: Rabbits are immaculately clean, and, once they have matured and are spayed/neutered, they go to great lengths not to soil their living quarters. They will readily use a litter-box, and if the box is cleaned or changed daily, there is no offensive odor</p>
<p>Myth 6: Rabbits love to be picked up and cuddled, and do not scratch or bite.</p>	<p>Reality: Although some rabbits tolerate handling quite well, many do not like to be picked up and carried. If rabbits are mishandled they will learn to nip to protect themselves. If they feel insecure when carried they may scratch to get down. Unspayed/unneutered rabbits often exhibit territorial behavior such as "boxing" or nipping when their territory is "invaded" by the owner.</p>
<p>Myth 7: Rabbits – especially dwarf breeds – do not require much living space.</p>	<p>Reality: Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that will permit them ample freedom of movement even when they are confined. Dwarf rabbits tend to be more active and energetic than some larger breeds, and require relatively more space.</p>
<p>Myth 8: Rabbits can be left alone for a day or two when owners travel.</p>	<p>Reality: Rabbits need daily monitoring. Problems that are relatively minor in some species (e.g. a day or two of anorexia) may be life-threatening in rabbits, and may require immediate veterinary attention.</p>
<p>Myth 9: Rabbits do fine with a bowl of rabbit food and some daily carrots.</p>	<p>Reality: The single most important component of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, which should be provided, free-choice, daily. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities.</p>



Rabbit Care Videos

Learn how to take care of a pet rabbit from bunny lover Amy Sedaris and rabbit expert Mary E. Cotter, Ed.D., LVT, in these Howcast videos.

The complete list of videos may be found at <https://www.howcast.com/guides/1187-how-to-take-care-of-a-pet-rabbit/>. They are also available on Youtube by searching on “rabbit care” and “cotter,” though a few may not show up and will need to be searched by title.



1. 8 Common Myths about Rabbits (5:50)
2. Are Rabbits Good Pets for Children? (2:17)
3. Are Rabbits Low-Maintenance Pets? (1:34)
4. Best Carrier for a Rabbit (4:55)
5. Best Litter Material for a Rabbit (6:10)
6. Can I Keep a Pet Rabbit in My Child's Room? (1:28)
7. Can I Leave My Pet Rabbit Alone for the Weekend? (1:42)
8. Can I Walk My Pet Rabbit on a Leash? (1:32)
9. Can Rabbits Be Litter Trained? (2:59)
10. Do Rabbit Teeth Need to Be Trimmed? (4:19)
11. Do Rabbits Get Along with Other Pets? (2:22)
12. Do Rabbits Need Veterinary Care? (3:56)
13. Do Rabbits Shed? (3:37)
14. How Long Do Rabbits Live? (2:02)
15. How to Determine a Rabbit's Age (3:45)
16. How to Get a Rabbit Back in Its Cage (2:23)
17. How to Give a Rabbit a Pill (3:40)
18. How to Groom Your Rabbit (5:05)
19. How to Handle a Pet Rabbit (7:40)
20. How to Help a Pet Rabbit with Gas Pain (3:15)
21. How to Help an Overweight Rabbit (5:00)
22. How to Know If Your Rabbit Is Sick (3:19)
23. How to Know When to Euthanize a Rabbit (4:52)
24. How to Make a Rabbit Less Aggressive (6:42)
25. How to Massage Your Rabbit (4:52)
26. How to Rabbit-Proof Your Home (6:06)
27. How to Take a Rabbit's Temperature (4:11)
28. How to Take Your Rabbit on a Car Trip (3:59)
29. How to Trim Your Rabbit's Nails (9:19)
30. Is Your Pet Rabbit's Pee & Poop Normal? (4:42)
31. Should I Get a Friend for My Rabbit? (4:53)
32. What Is the Best Diet for a Rabbit? (7:02)
33. What Kinds of Toys Do Rabbits Like? (4:47)
34. What to Consider before Buying a Rabbit (7:34)
35. Which Rabbit Breed Is Best? (2:22)
36. Why Are So Many Rabbits in Shelters? (3:16)
37. Why It's Dangerous to Keep a Pet Rabbit Outdoors (3:00)