



Exotic Animal Hospital of Philadelphia

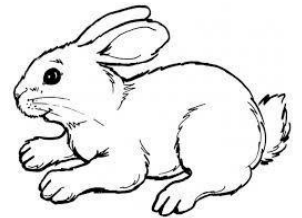
CARE OF RABBITS

You got a new Rabbit? Congratulations!

Please refer to this handout in helping you setting your new bunny up for success as most of the diseases and emergency presentations to the veterinary hospital stem from improper husbandry and could be avoided.

BACKGROUND:

- Rabbits are very gentle and social and make excellent pets.
- They generally enjoy their owners' company and attention.
- Bunnies are quite interactive and communicate with thumping, ear positions, and "lucky charms" kicks in the air called binkies.
- They enjoy many toys and love to chew things.
 - Their chewing habit is the number one reason why rabbits should not be allowed free range in the house. "Rabbit-proofing" your home is very important, especially securing cords from reach.
 - Do not allow them to chew paint off the wall or nibble on anything other than their toys.
- Rabbits cannot vomit
- Rabbits are easily litter-trained, just place a small litter pan in the area of the cage that they frequent.
- Be careful with handling your rabbit. They have very powerful hind legs and can break their backs when they kick forcefully to free themselves. Ask your vet how to properly lift and support your rabbit's hind legs.
- Also, remember that rabbits have no sweat glands in their skin as we do and dissipate heat from their ears. It is important to keep your rabbits cool, as they can easily fall easily to heatstroke at temperatures above 29.4 C (85 F).



DIET:

- The wild rabbit lives on a diet of grasses and leaves and has a specialized gut which is adapted for this. The large intestine contains bacteria which break down the grass to make it digestible.
- The adult rabbit needs a high fiber, restricted carbohydrate, restricted protein and virtually no fat diet to stay healthy. **The most important thing in a rabbit's diet is HAY HAY HAY.** Your rabbit must have 24 hour access to loose Timothy hay. Check that the hay is good quality; it should have a fresh sweet smell, not dusty or moldy. Young rabbits (less than 6 months of age) can also have alfalfa hay in addition to Timothy hay.

- Rabbits do **NOT** require pellets in their diet. Pellets have too many calories and not enough fiber. Additionally, they are very bad for their teeth.
- **Fresh vegetables:** These are an important source of vitamins. Around 1-2 bowls should be given every day.
 - Good vegetables to feed your rabbit include **red/green leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, escarole, parsley, carrot tops and cilantro.**
 - If your rabbit has never had fresh vegetables, start with one piece/day and start off with one type of lettuce at a time.
- Treats: As a treat, you can offer your rabbit a small piece (no larger than 1 cm) of carrot, celery or apple. They should not receive more than one treat per week.
- **Inappropriate foods:** You should NEVER offer your rabbit other treats such as seeds or sugary snacks. These are not appropriate and can upset their stomach.
- Remember that any diet changes **MUST** be made slowly. If it is too fast, this can upset the gut and cause bacterial imbalances and that can kill your rabbit. It may take up to 4 weeks to introduce a new vegetable, hay or brand of pellets.

WATER

- 24 hour access to fresh water is essential. The bowl or bottle should be scrubbed out with soap every other day to prevent mold and bacterial growth. We recommend that you offer both a water bowl and bottle to ensure adequate intake.

ENCLOSURE:

- Size: A rabbit should be able to hop 3 times from 1 end of the cage to another.
- Floor: The floor of the cage should be solid, NOT wire (this may cause ulceration of the feet).
 - If you have a cage with a wire floor, you can cover it with plastic or rubber. On the floor of the cage (over the plastic or rubber), a towel, a thick layer of hay or soft bedding should be placed. This will also help to protect your rabbit's feet.
 - Of course, you must keep the cage clean and dry and change the towels if they become soiled.
- Litter pan: We recommend placing a low sided triangular shaped litter pan in the corner of the cage. This should be filled with hay, shredded newspaper or shredded paper towels.
 - You should NOT use wood shavings or kitty litter as this can be very irritating to the respiratory tract.

EXERCISE/GROOMING

- Rabbits should be allowed out of the cage to exercise every day. You must ensure that the play area is "rabbit-proof" – make sure there are no electrical wires or wooden furniture that they can chew.
- Rabbits should be brushed frequently when they are molting and daily if they are long haired rabbits.

HEALTH

- We advise spaying of ALL female rabbits because they are prone to cancers of the uterus and mammary glands.
- A single male can be left intact, but if you have more than one male they may fight.

- Females can mate and have babies as early as 4-6 months old.
- Check the teeth and the bottoms of the feet regularly.
 - Contact your veterinarian if you notice that the feet are red, swollen, wet or painful. Contact your veterinarian if you notice that the teeth are crooked, too long, broken or discolored. Additionally, contact your veterinarian if you notice that your rabbit is drooling, has wetness around the mouth or front legs or is dropping food from its mouth.
- It is very important that rabbits are always eating and always defecating. The feces should be the same amount, color, shape (round) and size every day. It is an emergency if your rabbit stops eating, stops defecating, produces small feces or develops diarrhea. Please contact your veterinarian immediately.
- Rabbits are very good at hiding signs of being sick. Therefore take them to the vet quickly if your rabbit is acting abnormally at all - more sleepy, hiding, not playing, has droopy eyes, has watery eyes or seems to be too quiet. They can become very sick very quickly so be vigilant!
- We recommend vaccinating all rabbits against Rabbit Hemorrhagic Diarrhea Virus (**RHDV**), even if indoors only. Ask us about the vaccine!

Top 10 reasons to visit the vet!

Weight Loss
 Anorexia & Small Fecal balls 8-12 hrs = EMERGENCY
 Wheezing & Open mouth breathing
 Swollen Jaws
 Hair Loss or Itchy Skin
 Vaginal Bleeding
 Diarrhea
 Nasal Discharge
 Drooling
 Trauma, Lameness, Fractures

It was a pleasure working with your pet today, please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns

