

**All Creatures Care Cottage
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Client information handout

Rabbits

Introduction

Rabbits are lagomorphs, not rodents. There are approximately 45 varieties of domestic rabbits. The most popular are Angora, Dwarf, Dutch, Lop, and Rex. They are quiet, gentle and make great pets. Their life span is approximately 10 – 15 years.

Behavior

They love to explore and chew. So you must provide a safe environment whether it is inside or out. Cover electrical cords with PVC pipes and place furniture in front of outlets. Rinse lawns well after use of insecticides.

Rabbits become bored easily and should be provided with toys to stimulate them. These can be inexpensive such as cardboard paper towel rollers, or store bought wooden parrot toys. Avoid any toys with rope or fiber. Rabbits have powerful rear legs that must be supported. When picked up or handled, the rear legs must be supported or your pet could suffer a spinal injury to itself by kicking. Wrapping in a towel is the safest way to move a bunny.

Housing

Rabbits are natural burrowers and like to hide. Provide a small box in the hutch or housing area. Cage must be cleaned every few days. Temperature should be maintained between 55-90 degrees Fahrenheit. Rabbits can die of heat stroke if temperatures go above 90 degrees Fahrenheit and need shade, misting and frozen water jugs to keep cool on hot days. A sipper bottle provides constant clean water, as rabbits drink a lot of water. Brush your pet regularly to prevent hairballs. Check feces stuck around rear, which is abnormal and life threatening. Keep nails trimmed regularly. Keep your pet caged or hutched when unsupervised. Bedding should be timothy hay or oat hay. Non-neutered males will fight even if no females are present and should be housed separately and neutered if not bred. We recommend brushing and grooming your bunny frequently and checking their underside for fecal or urine soiling.

Diet

The most common cause of disease in rabbits is improper feeding. A rabbit's diet should be made up of fresh alfalfa pellets, fresh timothy and/or oat hay, water and fresh vegetables. If sticky stools are noted, reduce or eliminate the pellets you are feeding. Pellets should be fresh and high in fiber (18% minimum). Pellets make up less of a rabbit's diet as it grows older, and hay should be available at ALL times. Do not purchase more than 6 weeks worth of feed or it may become spoiled.

When shopping for vegetables, look for both dark leafy vegetables as well as root vegetables. Stay away from beans and rhubarb. Hay is essential to a rabbit's good health, providing roughage, which reduces hairballs and other blockages. Apple tree twigs also provide good roughage.

- Bunnies 12 weeks and under: Offer unlimited pellets and unlimited hay and introduce vegetables.
- Young Adults 7-months to 1 year: Introduce grass and oat hay and reduce alfalfa. Decrease pellets to ½ cup per 6 pounds of body weight. Add more vegetables. Fruit daily ration is no more than 1-2 ounces per 6 pounds of body weight.
- Adults 1-5 years old: Unlimited grass hay, oat hay, and straw. ¼ to ½ cup pellets per 6 pounds of body weight. 2-cups chopped vegetables per 6 pounds of body weight.
- Senior over 6 years: If weight is maintained, continue adult diet. Frail older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Annual blood work-ups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits.

Common medical problems

All rabbits not being bred should be spayed or neutered by four months of age. This will protect against behavioral as well as reproductive problems. Be advised that it is difficult to sex a young rabbit and should be done by a skilled veterinarian. Your new pet should see a veterinarian for an initial exam, and look for the following signs: slobbering, poor appetite, unusual droppings, noisy breathing, balding, sneezing, over grown-teeth, head tilt, swollen abdomen, blood on mouth or genitalia, matted or wet fur around nose or eyes.

Visit your exotic veterinarian for routine health checks.