

Rabbits Fact Sheet

Diet-Herbivorous

Hay and/or grass ad lib (avoid lawnmower clippings)

Fresh vegetables

Controlled quantities of a pelleted rabbit food.

(Rabbit mixes are not recommended due to rabbits selectively feeding on components high in carbohydrates, leading to obesity, dental disease (overgrown teeth) and lower intestinal motility etc)

Avoid sudden diet changes as this can lead to digestive disturbances.

Housing

Can be kept as indoor pets with litter trays

Best kept with access to outdoors with a run, which is protected from predators (eg foxes)

The run will need access to a shelter/hutch to escape from adverse weather.

Hutch area should be large enough for rabbits to stretch out and stand up on back legs.

Rabbits are sociable and are best kept with other rabbits, rather than alone.

Best not kept with guinea pigs as their dietary requirements are different.

Vaccinations

We are now using a single annual vaccination injection against myxomatosis and viral haemorrhagic disease. This is licensed for rabbits from 5 weeks of age and provides longer lasting immunity against myxomatosis than the previous vaccine

Myxomatosis

Spread via fleas and mosquitoes

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)

Spread via fleas, flies, mosquitoes as well as via urine, faeces, saliva etc of affected rabbits.

Both diseases are usually fatal viral diseases, for which there is no effective treatment

Neutering

Castration (at 3 months or older)

Reduce aggression and prevent breeding

Spay (at 4 months or older)

Reduce aggression, pulling fur out and breeding. Prevent uterine cancer-a common condition in rabbits over 5 years old

Parasites

Fleas-

These insects can cause irritation and transmit certain diseases such as myxomatosis

Mites-

These are microscopic parasites but cause irritation to skin and ears. Certain spot-on treatments are available at the practice.



Worms-

Roundworms are not usually a problem, but tapeworms can cause cysts in rabbits.

E. cuniculi -

A single celled parasite which affects the urinary tract and the nervous system. Treatment with oral pastes are available at the practice.

Flystrike-

Prevention is by means of keeping rear ends clear.

Common rabbit problems

Overgrown teeth

Signs including decreasing appetite, excessive salivating, faecal staining around the perineum. This is usually a recurring problem once overgrowth has started, with long term problems. Often due to inadequate chewing of hay/grass and low dietary calcium.

Abscesses

Soft tissue swellings, often around the face associated with dental disease.

Eye discharges

Often associated with overgrown teeth damaging the tear drainage system from the eyes

Snuffles

Nasal discharges associated with respiratory disease (pasteurella multocida)

Ileus

A slowing of food passage through the gut. This can potentially develop into a life-threatening condition if not treated early

Flystrike

Flies are attracted to dirty rear ends (in order to breed) whereby flesh-eating maggots develop quickly, causing potentially life-threatening problems."

Scurfy skin

Often due to mites

Head tilt

Most often due to the parasite E.cuniculi or a bacterium pasteurella multocida

Urinary tract infections

These are often associated with E.cuniculi

