

## Desexing

Desexing rabbits is strongly recommended to prevent unwanted litters. There are also numerous health & behavioural benefits from desexing your rabbits including reducing the incidence of tumours & aggressive/dominance behaviour. Rabbits can be desexed from 5-6 months. This is usually a day procedure and we recommend they bring a packed lunch.

## Companion Animals

Rabbits are social animals & so having multiple rabbits is recommended. When introducing a new rabbit to an existing one careful supervision is required to prevent aggression & fighting. Neutered combos, a male and a female, or 2 females are good combinations. Remember to have them desexed as appropriate to avoid extra bunnies! Rabbits can bully guinea pigs if housed together, as well as health issues.



## Toilet Training

Rabbits can easily be toilet trained as they generally use the same area to urinate/defecate.

Place litter trays where the rabbit chooses to toilet & use a substrate such as straw, hay or shredded paper. Litter trays need to be cleaned out often to reduce negative health impacts.



## Husbandry

Rabbits should have constant access to fresh water; dripper bottles hung on the side of the cage are generally better than a bowl to keep clean and avoid mosquitos.

Rabbits should have daily exercise outside their hutch for a few hours to reduce the risk of obesity, for mental stimulation & to maintain a healthy digestive tract. (Remember they chew, dig & jump!). Some sunshine is needed for normal metabolism, just like us.

Behavioural enrichment is also important for rabbits. Cardboard boxes, tree branches, wooden toys, phone books & treat foods can all be used to entertain your bunny.

Hutches should be large enough to allow a rabbit to stand up fully & take at least 3 hops. There should be a hide for them to go if they are scared. Wire flooring can lead to foot problems so thick bedding should be used & needs to be changed weekly, as well as removing soiled patches daily. Rabbits normally eat some of their poo; don't be alarmed!



Rabbits like grooming and petting– and they are most trainable from an early age, so start socialising when you get them. Nails may need trimming and that is another learnt skill. Always lift a rabbit from under it's body– NEVER by it's ears or legs. If rabbits get a fright, they tend to jump, so sitting at ground level is best from a safety perspective. For your concern– they can also kick and scratch with vigour. Remember to wash your hands after handling your rabbit.

Rabbits are prone to heat stress at temperatures greater than 28C° therefore ensure they have shade & the hutch is well ventilated. Fans can be helpful.

Rabbits have the potential to live for 8-12 years when given the appropriate diet & housing conditions.

Rabbits make great indoor pets but be sure to rabbit proof your house first– bunnies love chewing on electric cords but can be electrocuted. They can be litter box trained.

# Caring For Your Rabbit



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## Diet

Feeding the rabbit right is the single most important thing to keep a rabbit healthy. Rabbits digestive systems have evolved to digest large amounts of fibre on a daily basis (think of a wild rabbit, they only eat grass!)

In rabbits the caecum is a large fermentation vat full of good bacteria & protozoa that assist in the digestion of fibrous foods. If the food is too sugary or too high in protein the bacteria will produce excessive gas causing discomfort, gut stasis & it may result in diarrhoea.

Rabbits teeth constantly grow (like a horse) & hence it is important that they have things to chew. Chewing will wear the teeth down at an appropriate rate & reduce the need for dental procedures.

Things to offer include; old phone books, wooden chew blocks (not treated timber), fresh grass & grass hay.

Pellets are not a complete diet! Pellets should only be a small part of your rabbit's daily food—approximately 1tablespoon daily. This is their dessert portion. Commercial rabbit food seldom has enough fibre. Oxbow and Vetafarm are brands we recommend. Please consult your vet for info on formulated diets for your rabbit!

Many health problems are related to poor diet.

### What **NOT** to feed

Cereals, corn, pellets, grains, nuts, seeds, beans, peas, bread, chocolate, biscuits, sweets or sugar.

Avoid legume hays - such as Lucerne & Clover as these are too high in calcium & protein for rabbits. Diets high in these components can lead to urinary problems. Ideal hays include pasture hay or Timothy hay, or just plain grass. Don't feed lawn clippings.



## What you should be feeding:

**Fibre, fibre, fibre** - **This is the most important** food stuff to be offering your rabbit is fibre, the best source of this is fresh grass, or grass hay (timothy, oaten, wheaten, pasture, meadow, ryegrass or paddock hay). Be sure to check for weeds or mould before feeding to your bunny.

**Leafy Green Vegetables** - are also a good source of nutrients for your rabbit e.g. Asian greens, cabbage leaves, beet/carrot tops, celery/celery tops, broccoli, spinach leaves, dark leafed lettuce varieties, herbs (basil, parsley, mint, dill, coriander), Brussels sprouts, kale. ***Feed 3-4 different greens in 2 packed cups per 1kg bodyweight per day.***



**Treats** - You should only feed a total of 1-2 tablespoons of treats per day. Examples of treats include: pellets, root vegetables (carrot, sweet potato), fruit & capsicum.

Keep feeding habits & food types consistent. Rapid changes will cause digestive upsets such as diarrhoea or gas. If changes are needed, we recommend a 2-3 week transition period.



## Vaccination

In Australia, domestic rabbits require vaccination against Calicivirus. This disease has been released purposely to control the wild rabbit population & is typically fatal in un-vaccinated rabbits.

Transmission between wild & domestic rabbits can occur very easily. The current vaccine is effective against the released strains of Calicivirus but may not be effective against some other strains of the virus.

Vaccination of young (kitten) rabbits should be conducted from 6weeks with booster vaccinations until after 12weeks of age.

Rabbits then require a vaccination every 6 months to maintain protection against Calicivirus.

## Worming & Other Parasites

Routine intestinal deworming of rabbits is not required in Australia. However, monthly application of parasite treatments is recommended to repel biting insects.

Mosquitoes should be kept to a minimum with mozzie netting over the hutch, bug zappers where appropriate and overturning stagnant water in the yard.

***Please ask your veterinarian which parasite treatment is most appropriate for your rabbit!***

### **EMERGENCY?**

- if your rabbit is lethargic
- If your rabbit hasn't defaecated >12h
- If your rabbit won't eat it's fave treat

Pet insurance is worth considering for your rabbit, especially if they become unwell or are injured.