

## Common Health Issues

### Overgrown teeth:

A Rabbit's teeth grow continuously so give your Rabbit something to nibble on to keep them trim. A gnawing block, mineral stone, or a branch from a willow or apple tree will help wear the teeth. Occasionally teeth may overgrow for other reasons. A local vet or veterinary nurse should trim these every few weeks as necessary.

### A hard stomach and difficulty breathing:

This is usually Bloat and can be fatal. Usually caused by overfeeding of 'greens', veterinary attention will be required as soon as possible. Immediately remove all food and bedding but ensure plenty of fresh water is available.

### Rapid breathing:

If a Rabbit is breathing rapidly with its nostrils wide open it usually indicates heat exhaustion. Always ensure your pet has a shaded ventilated section in a run or hutch.

### Overgrown claws:

Domestic Rabbits will probably need their claws clipping from time to time.

You should obtain professional advice and a demonstration from your veterinary surgery before attempting this procedure yourself.

### Runny eyes:

Usually caused by dust from hay or in the wind. Wipe the eyes gently from inner to outer corners with cotton wool soaked in warm sterile water (boil water and then allow to cool off). If eyes are red and swollen immediate veterinary attention is required.

### Scratching behind the ears:

This may indicate ear mites. Other signs include fur loss, red or flaky skin and brownish deposits inside the ears. Your vet can supply a cream or lotion to treat the symptoms and you should thoroughly clean the hutch everyday until the condition subsides.

### Diarrhoea:

Often caused by lack of fibre or over-feeding with greens. Hutch should be cleaned and disinfected twice daily and bedding changed. Give your Rabbit plenty of fresh water and hay. Consult your vet if the symptoms continue beyond 24 hours.

### Duty of Care:

Every owner has a duty of care towards their animal. People should not take on the responsibility of keeping a pet unless they have the means to provide it with appropriate care and attention. This includes providing specialist treatment in the case of sickness or injury to prevent unnecessary suffering. Owners should arrange for their animal to be taken to a vet as soon as it becomes ill and be prepared to pay for any treatment themselves.

# Keeping Rabbits As Pets

## Rabbits:

Friendly, intelligent and clean, Rabbits make great family pets. With space to exercise, suitable accommodation, food and bedding most Rabbits are happy living indoors or outside. However, you will need to devote some time every day to their care.

Rabbits generally need more attention than most smaller pets and can occasionally scratch and bite. For this reason they are considered unsuitable pets for younger children. However they make ideal pets for older children under supervision of an adult.



## Housing

### Outdoor Rabbits

Your Rabbit hutch must be weatherproof with a separate nest area and plenty of dry bedding (clean straw is ideal). Ideally a hutch for two medium sized Rabbits should measure 150 x 60 x 60cm. But if your hutch is smaller, consider adding a separate run in the garden or allowing some daily supervised exercise for your pets outside the cage. The hutch should allow shade during the heat of the day and shelter from strong winds. A grass run can be built into the hutch or located elsewhere in your garden – again with a nest area protected from the sun. A litter tray can be emptied daily and makes the hutch easier to clean.

### Indoor Rabbits:

Rabbits love company, making them great house pets. A quiet area for sleep, a straw-filled nest box and a clean litter tray are all you need for a happy indoor Rabbit. Some 'Rabbit-proofing' may be necessary (cables and houseplants are very 'chewable') and you'll need to ensure your Rabbit has an outdoor run in the garden – Rabbits need natural light to obtain vitamin D. Rabbits can mix well with other domestic pets but careful introduction and supervision is required.

## Types of Rabbit

There are many varieties, each with their own characteristics. Here's some general tips:

- Male Rabbits tend to be more predictable and even-tempered
- Giant breeds require more space and more feed
- Some dwarf varieties can be temperamental so are less suitable for children
- Longhaired Rabbits will require daily grooming and care
- Common breeds such as Dutch, English, Netherland Dwarf and Dwarf Lop Eared are more docile. Despite their names some breeds can grow quite large so always ask for advice first

## Feeding

A typical Rabbit diet should be 75% hay with plenty of fresh water. A good quality pellet will provide any additional nutrients and vitamins they need. They also enjoy fresh vegetation – carrots, spinach, watercress, broccoli, apples, and dandelion leaves – but care should be taken not to overfeed. Never feed your Rabbit grass clippings, potatoes, or lettuce as these can cause health problems.

## Looking after your Rabbit

### Exercise & Entertainment:

All Rabbits need daily exercise so encourage your Rabbit to practise its natural behaviour. A pipe in its hutch can act as a burrow, or a box filled with shredded paper can encourage digging – include some root vegetables to nibble on as a treat.



### Handling:

Young Rabbits can be nervous and should be allowed to gradually get used to their surroundings – and to you. For the first few days, talk gently to your Rabbit to build up trust, then slowly introduce your hand into the hutch. Your Rabbit will become inquisitive and more confident around you. After a week or two, try picking up your pet using both hands. Place your thumb across its shoulders with your fingers wrapped gently around the ribs; place your other hand beneath the hindquarters for support. This is a good time to start grooming your Rabbit – something which should be done daily.

### Breeding:

Rabbits can breed very quickly from 4 months old. Pregnancy lasts 30-32 days and litter sizes vary from 4-12 Rabbits. Baby Rabbits must not be touched for the first 4 days and will open their eyes after 8-10 days. Babies can be removed from their mother at 5-6 weeks.

## Tips for a happy healthy Rabbit

### Community:

One Rabbit will become very lonely on its own so it's best to keep a compatible pair or group. Neutering and spaying will prevent unwanted litters and fighting. Generally two neutered males or two un-neutered females will live together, or a neutered male and an un-neutered female. We do not recommend keeping Rabbits and Guinea Pigs together as their requirements are very different.

### Health:

A healthy Rabbit will be alert, have discharge-free eyes and nose and a shiny coat. Breathing should be quiet and regular. If you are worried about any aspect of your Rabbit's health, seek veterinary advice. For a healthy life, your Rabbit needs the following:

- Your time and attention - they should be checked twice a day
- A good balanced diet with no sudden changes
- Clean dry housing, cleaned once a week with a mild disinfectant
- No extreme or sudden changes in temperature
- Water bottle and feed bowls cleaned daily
- Gnawing blocks and chew toys to help wear their continually growing teeth
- Daily grooming for longhaired Rabbits
- Weekly grooming for short-coated Rabbits
- Your rabbit will pass 2 types of faeces: During normal daytime they will pass a hard pellet, which is normally what you will find. At night they pass faeces known as "Caecotrophs" - soft, mucousy pellets which will be directly eaten from the anus. This is normal behaviour. However obese rabbits will have problems with this, so do not allow a rabbit to become obese.