



Rabbit Information Pack



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With more and more people owning pet rabbits, here at Ashley Veterinary Centre, we have prepared this information pack for new rabbit owners, highlighting a few important aspects of rabbit care and things that should be considered to ensure good health of your pet.

We hope you find this useful and if you have any questions regarding rabbit care or health please do not hesitate to call in or phone the surgery on **0141 959 6100** to discuss your concerns with a member of staff.

Rabbit Housing

Rabbits can be kept both indoors and outdoors. House rabbits should be housed in a large cage that has plenty space for the rabbit to hop around and should be given a space within the house to exercise under supervision daily.

Outdoor rabbits should be kept in a strong, secure hutch. Due to our unpredictable climate it is important that your rabbit is protected from the elements and therefore the hutch should be sheltered, situated out-with the direct sun and if possible protected from the wind and rain. Owners often keep hutches within garden sheds or a suitable pen. In all cases, it is important that the enclosure is enclosed to avoid interference by other animals such as foxes, cats and dogs.

Rabbit Husbandry

There are various materials you can use as bedding for a rabbit either in a hutch or cage. Newspaper is suitable for lining the hutch/cage and straw, hay or sawdust can be used as bedding.

Straw and meadow hay are very different things and your rabbit should always have fresh hay available for eating. This should be topped up twice daily or more regularly if required.

It is advisable to completely clean out your rabbits cage/hutch twice weekly or more often if soiled. In between complete cage cleans it may be possible to clean the area where the rabbit is soiling daily to ensure the cage stays clean. A dirty cage, soiled with urine and faeces will attract flies which is very unpleasant and can cause health problems for your rabbit.

Rabbit Dietary Requirements

It is very important to make sure you are feeding your rabbit a balanced diet made up of the correct foods to ensure the good health of your pet. Rabbits fed the wrong diet can become very unwell.

Below is a list of the feeding requirements of your rabbit.

- Always ensure that fresh hay (other than your rabbits bedding material) is available for eating – this should be topped up twice daily or more often if required. In some cases a hay rack or bowl is a good idea to prevent the hay becoming soiled on the hutch floor.
- Equivalent of one egg cup daily of a complete rabbit food made up strictly of nuggets e.g. Supa Rabbit Excel.
- A plentiful supply of fresh vegetables replaced twice daily. These can include: Spring greens, kale, any member of the cabbage family, broccoli, carrots, cauliflower, bags of mixed

lettuce from the supermarket, small amount of iceberg lettuce, cucumber, celery, peppers, flat leaf parsley, mange tout, baby corn and Brussels sprouts.

- Avoid feeding your rabbit starchy vegetables such as potatoes, sweet potato and frozen or canned garden peas.

Handling Your Rabbit

When handling a rabbit is important that he/she feels safe and secure. Talk to your rabbit as you approach it and do not make any sudden movements that may startle it. Always try to approach a rabbit at a low level, similar to its own. It is a good idea, if possible, to let your rabbit come to you once it's comfortable. When you pick up your rabbit, always make sure you support its back end with one hand and hold the rabbit tightly into your body. It is a good idea to allow your rabbit's head to tuck under your arm. This can help make them feel more secure.

When you bring your rabbit into the surgery we can help you by demonstrating the best way to handle them.

Companionship

Rabbits are very social creatures and enjoy interaction with both people and other rabbits. Often to ensure company for your new pet, rabbit owners will purchase two rabbits rather than one on its own. Both single sex pairings and pairing a male and a female can be successful but in either case we would advise neutering (as detailed opposite) to try to prevent fighting between the pair.

People commonly believe that rabbits and guinea pigs live happily together. In reality this is often not the case and this pairing often leads to the rabbit dominating the guinea pig. We strongly recommend that rabbits and guinea pigs are not housed together.

Vaccinations

Like dogs and cats, rabbits can also have vaccinations that prevent them from catching serious diseases. These vaccinations can be administered from 6 weeks of age. There are two diseases that we commonly vaccinate against:

Myxomatosis - This is a disease transmitted by fleas and contact with other infected rabbits or objects. Myxomatosis is a very serious disease that causes rabbits to become very ill, very suddenly. We recommend a yearly vaccination against this disease.

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) - This is the second disease that we advise vaccinating your pet rabbit against. Like myxomatosis, rabbits become very seriously ill very quickly if they contract this disease. Again we recommend a yearly vaccination to ensure your pet is protected from this illness.

Neutering

Neutering is a surgical procedure that is performed on both male and female rabbits to prevent breeding. The surgery is important for behavioural and for health reasons. This surgery can be carried out from 5 months of age or slightly sooner if a male/female combination are housed together. All rabbits should be checked at the surgery by our veterinary surgeon prior to surgery.

Daily Health Checks for Your Rabbit

In order to ensure your pet is in good health and any problems are identified quickly and treated immediately, it is important that you carry out a few quick checks daily when you are handling your rabbit. These include:

- Check eyes for discharge, redness or any abnormalities.
- Look into your rabbit's ears to check for wax or redness.
- Check nose for any discharge or sneezing.
- Examine your pet's fur and skin for any lesions, cuts or abnormalities.
- Examine your rabbit's rear end for impacted faeces, redness, urine scalding or any signs of infection.
- Look at your rabbit's feet for any sores or cuts and check the length of the nails.
- Check that your rabbit's front teeth are in alignment and make sure either the top or bottom teeth are not protruding outwards or into the mouth.
- Finally, watch your rabbit as it moves around and check for any changes to normal behaviour.

Common Signs of Illness in Rabbits

Rabbits are very good at hiding signs of illness from their owners, making it very difficult for them to realise when there is a problem.

Ensuring your pet is given a lot of close attention and getting to know their characteristics well will help you identify a problem.

Listed below are a few signs to look out for:

- If your rabbit stops eating and/or drinking as normal
- Sitting very quietly in the hutch instead of hopping around as normal
- No sign of droppings in the hutch or abnormal droppings seen
- Staining around mouth, under chin, on chest and paws from saliva
- Facial swelling
- Grinding of teeth
- Nasal Discharge
- Flaky, crusty ears
- Lameness

In an Emergency

We realise the worry that an ill pet causes, and therefore have taken measures to ensure that you can access veterinary support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When the surgery is closed, an emergency veterinary service is employed to deal with you and your pets' needs. If your pet takes ill or you are concerned that they are unwell in any way and our surgery is closed, please call our number **0141 959 6100** and you will be given the emergency phone number to seek veterinary advice and treatment if required.

