



Windrush Veterinary Services Rabbit Care Sheet

General facts:

- * Average life span: 7-10 years, some of the dwarf breeds can live even longer
- * Are herbivores whose teeth are continually growing
- * Are social animals that are curious and enjoy exploring
- * Can be trained to go to the bathroom in a litter box
- * Are not members of the rodent family, they are their own family called LAGOMORPHS
- * They are unable to vomit
- * Rabbits eat their own night droppings called cecotropes - this is normal and healthy!

Diet:

Hay: A good quality grass hay is the **MOST** important part of your rabbit's diet. Ideally, grass hay should form the base of an adult rabbit's diet (70-80% of what is eaten by the rabbit). It helps keep their constantly growing teeth properly worn and helps maintain normal digestion. Your bunny should have access to fresh hay at all times - feeding smaller handfuls of hay 2-3 times a day, rather than one large handful once a day, helps achieve this. Aim for your bunny to eat his/her body size in hay a day. Good types include: timothy, orchard grass, and brome - not all bunnies have the same taste in hay so try out a couple and see which one your bunny likes.

Pellets: Should **NOT** form the majority of what your rabbit eats. They are best considered as equivalent to multivitamins. While they are full of nutrients in a highly concentrated form they do not promote health teeth wear. When choosing a pellet, look for pellet that is high in fibre (18% minimum fibre content) and doesn't contain seeds/dehydrated fruits. Young/ growing rabbits 2-8 months old should be fed an alfalfa based pellet (alfalfa is the first listed ingredient, most commercial rabbit pellets are of this variety). Adult rabbits over 8 months old should be fed a timothy based pellet (timothy is the first listed ingredient, e.g. Martin Mills and Oxbow both carry timothy based pellets). As a general rule, young/growing rabbits can be feed unlimited pellets, while adult rabbits should be fed no more than a 1/4-1/2 cup of pellets per 6 lbs (2.5 kg) of body weight a day. These are general guidelines and every bunny is different and has different nutritional requirements.

Vegetables/greens: Your bunny can be offered and will enjoy a daily helping of fresh veggies. Variety is important - try to provide your bunny with at least 3 different types. When looking for veggies dark leafy greens are generally best. Wash all veggies before feeding to your bunny and do not feed your bunny any spoiled food. Remember to introduce any new veggies/greens gradually one at a time and eliminate any that cause loose stools. Good choices include: spring mix greens, bok choy, cilantro, romaine lettuce, dandelion greens, parsley, endive, escarole, green tops of the carrots, collard greens, radish tops, kale in small amounts, radicchio, mustard greens. (**AVOID:** ice berg/light leafed lettuce, rhubarb, beans)

Fruits/treats: Feed sparingly - **NO MORE** than 1 tbsp per 6 lbs (2.5 kg) of body weight a day. While your bunny will likely go gaga over bananas, apples and carrots, it's important to remember that these items are higher in sugars which can lead to obesity and digestion problems. Good choices include: apple, bananas, carrots, pear, blueberries, pineapple, raspberries, and strawberries.

Water: Your bunny should always have access to fresh, clean water.

NOTE: These are guidelines and every rabbit has different nutritional needs based on their age, lifestyle, health status and body condition. Make any changes to your rabbit's diet gradually and eliminate any items that cause loose stools. Working with a rabbit-savvy veterinarian to tailor your rabbit's diet based on his/her specific needs is highly recommended.

Housing:

Cage: Bigger is always better! The cage should be at least 4 times the size of your bunny when he/she is entirely stretched out, tall enough for your bunny to stand up in and have enough room for food bowls and a litter box. A rabbit's feet were not designed to stand on wire for long periods of time and this can lead to the development of sores on their feet. A solid bottom cage is better than a wire bottom cage - but if you are using a wire bottom cage provide a board or rug for your bunny to rest on or even better cover the wire completely with something solid. Exercise time outside of the cage is also important. Make sure your bunny is safe in a rabbit proof room, this includes covering all electric cords and moving toxic plants out of your bunny's reach.

Litter box: Rabbits in general are very tidy, clean animals and they can be litter trained. Litter habits generally improve after spaying/neutering. When litter training your bunny take your time and be patient. Start off by placing the box in a corner that your bunny has already chosen as its toilet. Place a handful of hay in the litter box to make it a more inviting place to visit. There are a number of safe bedding/litter options for your bunny such as yesterdays news, carefresh, aspen/wood stove pellets. Avoid using pine/cedar shavings as these products are often dusty with a strong odor and the fumes can be potentially toxic to the liver and can also lead to breathing problems.

Toys: Bunnies are curious by nature and enjoy mental stimulation. A busy bunny is less likely to get into trouble. Toys need not be expensive - a cardboard box (without staples/tape) with some holes cut in it can provide your bunny with hours of entertainment digging and chewing. By providing your bunny with an outlet for their normal behaviours you will also be saving other items in your house that you would rather your bunny not chew.

Medical care:

Rabbits, just like cats and dogs require routine veterinary care to help keep them healthy and happy. Rabbits are prone to a number of medical conditions such as gastrointestinal problems, obesity, infections, dental disease, reproductive disease and arthritis just to name a few. Yearly physical health exams (twice yearly for senior rabbits) with one of our rabbit savvy veterinarians is important in maintaining your bunny's long-term health. Spaying and neutering is also important for rabbits, just like it is for dogs and cats.

Websites:

House Rabbit Society - www.rabbit.org - is an excellent source for information about rabbit behaviour, litter training, bonding, spaying and neutering, housing, and many other topics!