



## DIET

A healthy diet is based on good quality rabbit pellets and ample fresh timothy hay. Rabbits should receive  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of pellets per five pounds of body weight each day. Hay should be freely available; it is vital as a source of fibre for good digestive function. Avoid alfalfa hay, as it is high in calcium and could result in kidney stones. Add at least two cups of fresh vegetables per six pounds of body weight each day. Good choices are dark green leafy vegetables and root vegetables. Small amounts of fresh fruit may be given as a treat. Fresh water in a sipper bottle should be available at all times. A multiple enzyme supplement may be given to aid digestion

## HEALTH

Find a veterinarian specializing in exotic animals and experienced in treating rabbits before you have an emergency. Rabbits are prone to intestinal blockages, due to swallowing hair while self-grooming. Frequent brushing can help minimize this problem. Be alert and consult a veterinarian if you notice signs of illness or injury such as: lack of appetite, change in droppings, bloated abdomen, runny nose, laboured breathing, head tilt, urinary problems, lumps or bumps.

## FERTILITY

All pet rabbits should be spayed or neutered to avoid unwanted babies. Spayed or neutered rabbits live longer, healthier lives. Aggressive and territorial behaviour is also reduced as a result of spaying or neutering, resulting in a more enjoyable companion. Be sure to find a veterinarian specialized in small mammals to perform a spay/neuter operation on your rabbit.



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# A Quick Guide to Rabbits

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For further information  
or questions, please  
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Rabbits are intelligent, social animals. When given plenty of attention, they make affectionate and rewarding family pets. They can be trained to use a litter box and are more enjoyable, responsive pets when living indoors as house rabbits. Given appropriate care, a rabbit can live up to ten years. Before adopting a pet rabbit, consider the following:

- Rabbits need daily exercise and play.
- Rabbits need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Everyone in your household should understand how to hold and play with a rabbit, and be eager to welcome a rabbit into the family!
- Rabbits can be destructive. They like to chew on books and wooden furniture and electrical cords, and will need to be monitored and confined.

## SETTING UP HOUSE

### Essential items:

- Spacious cage with solid bottom
- Litterbox
- Shavings
- Hiding box
- Bowl or gravity feeder
- Rabbit pellets
- Hay
- Water bottle
- Digging box
- Chew toys
- Pet carrier
- Comb (for long-haired rabbits)
- Nail clippers

### Optional items

- Sturdy, secure outdoor pen
- Petroleum laxative, for hairball prevention

## GENERAL CARE

Rabbits make good pets for a family, but children should not be expected to look after a rabbit without parental help. Small children need to be supervised. Rabbits should be lifted with their weight fully supported, never by the scruff of the neck or ears. They can easily be injured through improper handling. Brush your rabbit's coat daily and trim his nails every few weeks. Your rabbit can be taught to share your home, though hazards such as electrical cords and toxic plants should be removed or made inaccessible to prevent accidents. Rabbits will chew and dig, so provide acceptable items for these purposes, such as untreated wooden toys and a safe digging box filled with straw. Encourage your rabbit to use these items to minimize damage to your furnishings. Kind training, using lots of praise and treats, will teach your rabbit his place as a member of the family



## HOUSING

Rabbits should live indoors, safe from predators and climate extremes. Rabbits are very sensitive to heat stroke. Keep the environmental temperature at or below 80° F and make sure your rabbit's cage is well ventilated. Your rabbit may enjoy exercise in your yard, provided it is enclosed in a sturdy pen. However, the mere presence of a predator may result in a panic attack, causing injury or death due to heart failure. Always supervise your rabbit whenever it is outdoors and bring it in at nightfall.

It is important to choose as large a cage as possible, at least four times the size of your rabbit. Avoid wire floors, which can injure rabbits' feet. Give your rabbit a litter box filled with safe litter — never cedar shavings, which contain harmful oils. A hiding box will also be appreciated.

Chew toys such as untreated wicker baskets, untreated wood blocks and cardboard boxes will keep your rabbit busy. Remember that your rabbit needs ample daily exercise outside the cage to stay healthy and fit. Keep your rabbit's habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your pet to the cage.