



Tips for a Happy Homecoming – Rabbits

Congratulations on your new family member, and thank you for choosing to adopt from the Humane Society London & Middlesex! We've included information and resources in this package to help with successful integration of your new rabbit companion. If you are in need of support, advice, or further resources, please don't hesitate to reach out to our Adoptions Team (email: adoptions@hslm.ca).

First Things First (Before bringing home, or day of homecoming)

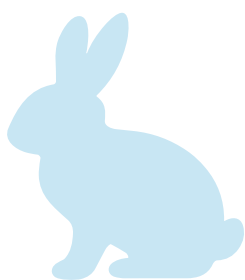
- Purchase an appropriately sized enclosure for your rabbit. The enclosure should allow them to fully stretch out and take at least four consecutive hops. Many store-bought cages marketed for rabbits are too small. Good alternatives include large dog crates, exercise pens (X-pens), or a fully rabbit-proofed room. Avoid enclosures with wire bottoms, as they can injure their feet
- Purchase the same brand of hay and pellets your rabbit is currently eating at the shelter. If you plan to switch foods, transition gradually over 7–10 days to avoid digestive upset. (Refer to your feeding guidelines handout for more information)
- Set up the enclosure in its permanent location. Place it in a quiet, low-traffic area away from loud noises, drafts, and direct sunlight
- Rabbit-proof at least one exercise area. Prepare a safe space outside the enclosure where your rabbit can explore and exercise daily. Cover or block access to cords, baseboards, houseplants, and anything unsafe to chew

The First Week

- Allow time to decompress. For the first 24 hours, minimize handling and allow your rabbit to settle in. Monitor eating, drinking, and stool production closely. If your rabbit is not eating or producing stool within the first 24 hours, contact a rabbit-savvy veterinarian immediately. A lack of appetite or stool can indicate gastrointestinal stasis, which is a medical emergency
- Begin building trust slowly. Sit quietly near the enclosure, allow your rabbit to approach you. Avoid reaching into their space
- Encourage exploration. Once your rabbit seems comfortable, open the enclosure door and allow them to come out on their own to explore their rabbit-proofed space. Sit on the floor and let them approach you voluntarily. If lifting is necessary, use proper rabbit handling techniques. Most rabbits do not enjoy being picked up, so handling should be limited whenever possible
- Use positive reinforcement. Speak softly and offer healthy treats in moderation to help build positive associations
- Delay introductions to other pets. Give your rabbit time to settle before introducing them to other animals in the home
- Reinforce litter habits. If accidents occur, blot urine with a paper towel and place it in the litter box. Clean the soiled area thoroughly with a vinegar and water solution to remove odor. This helps guide your rabbit back to the appropriate location

The Next Several Weeks

- Gradually expand access. Once your rabbit is comfortable, allow supervised exploration of additional rabbit-proofed areas of the home
- Introduce household members slowly. Encourage calm, quiet interactions and avoid overwhelming your rabbit with too many new experiences at once



Introducing non-rabbit pets:

- Begin with interactions through a secure barrier
- Always supervise closely
- Watch for signs of stress in either animal
- Only consider removing the barrier when both animals remain calm
- Continue supervised visits until a bond is clearly established. This process may take weeks. For some animals supervision may always be required
- Never introduce your rabbit to a dog with a known high prey drive

Bonding two rabbits:

- House rabbits separately in side-by-side enclosures
- Swap bedding or toys to exchange scents
- After 1–2 weeks, begin short (10 min) supervised meetings in neutral territory
- Gradually increase time together if interactions remain calm
- Never leave unbonded rabbits unsupervised
- Bonding is rarely immediate and may take weeks to several months. Once fully bonded, rabbits should not be separated. If one needs veterinary care, transport both together whenever possible

Enclosure Enrichment

Each enclosure should include:

- At least one hide space large enough for the rabbit to fit inside and turn around
- Toss toys (stacking cups, baby key rings, lightweight plastic toys)
- Safe chew items (apple sticks, untreated wooden toys)
- Optional dig box filled with shredded paper or safe digging material

Litter Box Tips

- Place hay directly in or above the litter box. Rabbits often eliminate while they eat
- Change litter and hay daily, but leave a small handful of used litter while litter training
- If droppings appear outside the box, place the pellets inside the litter box to reinforce the correct location
- Never use pine or dusty litter, as these can cause respiratory issues
- Provide one litter box per rabbit (and sometimes more in larger spaces)

Car Rides

- Always transport your rabbit in a secure carrier that is fastened with a seatbelt
- Keep the car quiet and at a comfortable temperature
- Monitor for signs of stress during travel and minimize time spent in the car

Grooming and Nail Care

- Brushing: Regular brushing reduces the amount of fur your rabbit ingests while grooming, lowering the risk of gastrointestinal blockages. Long-haired rabbits may require occasional trimming
- Bathing: Bathing can be dangerous and may cause shock. Only bathe a rabbit if absolutely necessary and consult your veterinarian for guidance
- Nail trimming: Rabbits require regular nail trims, similar to dogs and cats

