

### **Rabbit feeding guide.**

A rabbit's digestive system differs greatly from that of dogs and cats. Rabbits are 'hindgut fermenters'. This means that they use bacteria (otherwise known as gut flora) in their large intestine to break down fibre and provide nutrients. In the wild, rabbits are grazers and browsers. The majority of their diet is made up of grasses and other leafy plants. Fibre is an extremely important part of a rabbit's diet. Without enough fibre a rabbit's digestive system can slow down and even stop. Rabbits also produce soft mucousy faeces or pellets called caecotrophs which they then eat. These help in keeping the gut flora healthy. Below is a guide on how to achieve the best diet for your rabbit and hence keep your rabbit and its digestive system healthy.

- Roughage ie. hay and grass should make up the majority of your rabbit's diet.
- Good quality hay should be available at all times. Timothy or mixed grass hay is the best. Providing a hay rack can prevent your rabbit soiling the hay.
- Access to fresh grass. If there is lush spring grass available access should be introduced gradually so your rabbit's gut flora can adapt. Do not feed grass cut with a lawn mower, hand picked grass is fine.
- The remainder of your rabbit's diet can be made up with hard pellets and other fruit/vegetables.
- Good quality rabbit pellets are better than a rabbit mix as they don't allow selective feeding.
- Fruit (eg apple, pear) and other vegetables (eg cucumber, carrot and tomatoes) contain a very small amount of fibre and should only be fed occasionally. They can upset your rabbit's digestive system if fed too frequently. Lettuce shouldn't be included in your rabbit's diet as it can cause diarrhoea.
- Foods such as beans, peas and sweetcorn should be avoided as they can get stuck and block your rabbit's digestive system.
- If your rabbit is taking antibiotics or recovering from an operation the vet may prescribe probiotics to repopulate your rabbit's gut flora and prevent diarrhoea occurring.

A high fibre diet is also essential to keep your rabbit's teeth healthy. Rabbit's teeth differ from ours in that they grow throughout their lives. Your rabbit uses it's back molar teeth to grind roughage food and wears them down by doing this. If your rabbit's teeth are not chewing on enough fibrous food they grow too long and can cause oral pain and ulcers that may stop your rabbit from eating. Overlong cheek teeth can also cause eye discharge problems. If your rabbit ever stops eating you must contact us as soon as possible.

If you have any questions or queries about your rabbit's diet or teeth please contact us and speak to a member of staff.