



Rabbit diets

The phrase “you are what you eat” is especially true for rabbits. Many of the common diseases of pet rabbits could be avoided by feeding them the correct diet. Unfortunately, most pet rabbits are being fed the rabbit equivalent of “junk food”.

Wild rabbits eat mainly grass, which is high in fibre and silicates. Their teeth and digestive tract are designed to grind down and digest the high levels of fibre and silicates found in grass. Traditional rabbit mixes, however, are much lower in fibre, and high in carbohydrates (sugars and starches). This means the rabbit’s teeth are underused, and so overgrow. The carbohydrate also causes gut upsets - diarrhoea, bloat and colic. Rabbits will also often pick out their favourite bits of mixes - a process known as “selective feeding”, exacerbating the nutritional imbalance in the food



The following rabbit diseases can all be directly or indirectly caused by diet:

- Dental disease
- Colic
- Obesity
- Fly strike
- Conjunctivitis
- Bloat
- Diarrhoea
- Abscesses

Grass and hay should form the major component of your rabbit’s diet, to ensure adequate fibre intake. A small amount of vegetables daily will help to provide essential vitamins and minerals - but don’t feed too much, and avoid fruits as their high sugar content can cause gut upsets.

Supplement this with a small amount for commercial rabbit food. Check the fibre content of the food - it should be marked on the packaging, and should be at least 14% - ideally 20%. Using pelleted food rather than mixes will prevent “selective feeding”.

Avoid rabbit treats such as chocolate drops and honey carrots they are high in sugars.



Grass and hay

- Your rabbit should have unlimited access to hay and / or grass
- Avoid lawnmower clippings, as these ferment, causing tummy upset
- Let your rabbit run around the lawn - the exercise will do him good
- Ensure hay is good quality, and make sure it doesn't get wet
- Feed hay from a height using racks or hay bags, so it doesn't get soiled



Dry rabbit food

- Check the fibre content on the label - it should be a minimum of 14%, and ideally 20%.
- Some rabbits will pick out their favourite bits of rabbit mixes, and leave the rest - this is called selective feeding
- Selective feeding can be prevented by not topping up the bowl until your rabbit has emptied it.
- Alternatively, feed rabbit pellets to prevent selective feeding
- Feed no more than a small handful of dry food a day



Vegetables

- Feed a small vegetable portion daily as a source of vitamins
- Green leaves such as kale spring greens and dandelions should only be fed occasionally as they can cause urinary problems
- Avoid fruit as the high sugar content can cause tummy upsets



!!! Remember to change your rabbit's food gradually to avoid stomach upsets !!!