



# Rabbit healthcare

In recent years, rabbits have become the third most popular pet in the UK. They behave and feel different from other common pets like dogs and cats, and also have specific requirements.



## DIET

Your rabbit's diet should be based on good quality hay and vegetables. A small amount of pelleted food will also be necessary to ensure an extra supplementation of vitamins and minerals. Half an eggcup for small rabbits or an eggcup for big ones should be enough. Muesli diets are not recommended as your rabbit will select the bits he or she prefers and will leave the rest, therefore getting an unbalanced diet. An appropriate diet will prevent dental and gastrointestinal problems.



## COMPANIONSHIP

Rabbits are social animals and will always prefer to live in groups. Ideally a neutered female and a neutered male will be the best option although two females and two males can sometimes be kept together if they are neutered at an early age before they start fighting. Rabbits and guinea pigs should never be kept together due to behavioural and feeding differences and the risk of cross infection and trauma as the guinea pig could be kicked by the strong back legs of the rabbit.

## HOUSING

A hutch as big as possible (minimum hutch size of 6' x 2' x 2') and protected from predators such as cats, foxes, birds would be ideal. Provide them with toys and places to hide as rabbits are very shy animals and need a place to hide in when they feel scared. A hutch should only be a shelter and not the only living space. It should be attached to a secure run of at least 8' x 4' where the rabbits can run and jump.

The hutch should always be protected from extreme weather and kept dry and well ventilated with an additional indoor area where they can be kept when the weather is too cold. Good shading will also be essential to prevent heat stroke especially in hot or sunny days.

Check RWF's "A Hutch is Not Enough" campaign at:

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>





## VACCINATIONS

### MYXOMATOSIS

This is a fatal disease transmitted by direct contact with affected animals or more often by biting insects like fleas and mosquitoes. Even indoor rabbits can be affected as biting insects can access any house.

### VHD

Also a fatal disease that can be transmitted by anything that has been contaminated with the virus like clothes, shoes, car tyres, insects... .

**Both vaccinations are now given together from 5 weeks of age and need to be repeated annually.**

## NEUTERING

Advised at around 5 months of age as it will prevent health problems (womb cancer affects an 80% of entire females over 5 years old) and behavioural problems (urine spraying in the house, biting and fighting...). Note that after castration males will still be fertile for 4-6 weeks and therefore should be separated from entire females.

### Dental Problems

Routine check ups and a good diet will help preventing them.

### Mites

Very common. Can be treated successfully with a spot on.

### E. Cuniculi

Parasite that affects a high proportion of wild and domestic rabbits. It can cause urinary, eye and neurological problems.

### Fractures

Rabbit bones are very thin and therefore prone to fractures. Good handling is essential.



### Gut stasis

Rabbit digestive system is very delicate and can suffer from this disease which is very painful and can be fatal if left untreated.

### Abscesses

These can be challenging in rabbits as they can behave like tumours. Prompt and aggressive treatment is often necessary.

### Snuffles

Very common and mainly caused by a bacterial infection called pasteurellosis. Some rabbits might need longterm treatment.

### Flystrike

Frequent in old or sick rabbits that won't groom themselves very well but it can happen to any rabbits. Routine prevention with Rearguard is advised during spring/summer.