

Caring for your Rabbit

Rabbits make very rewarding pets. They are intelligent, fun and inquisitive creatures with strong personalities. They can live up to 10 years+ so are a long-term commitment like dogs and cats. Unlike other domesticated pets' rabbits are evolutionary very similar to their wild ancestors in terms of diet and nutritional needs.

Like dogs and cats' rabbits also need environmental enrichment, for example, tunnels to run through or hide in. Rabbits can be both clicker trained and house trained. They need a large exercise area which is high enough for them to stand up on their hind legs and jump around in as well as areas in which to hide. Additionally, they need enough space to lie down and stretch out.

Health

Rabbits are prey species so are adept at hiding illness until it is severe. Early signs of illness can include being off their food or difficulty in eating or sitting hunched up.

Diet

Rabbits need a diet rich in hay and fresh forage, for example washed Dandelions or flat-leaved parsley and a small amount of commercial pellet food (grass based not cereal). A guide is an egg cup sized daily portion for a 5kg rabbit.

Teeth

Like wild rabbits our pet's teeth continuously grow, about 1-2mm per week. To keep your pet rabbit's teeth short, they need apple branches or fibrous plants to chew.

Vaccinations

Rabbits like our other pets also need vaccinations, these cover Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease. Like dogs and cats, they require annual boosters.

Neutering/Breeding

If keeping several rabbits together neutering is advisable to prevent multiple litters as a doe can be feeding one litter whilst pregnant with the next. The gestation period for a rabbit is 30 days, it is important not to disturb the nest area if you suspect your rabbit has given birth as if she feels threatened, she may kill the kits. Neutering can be performed at about 6 months old for both sexes.

Fly Protection

Whilst flies are annoying to humans, they can be fatal for rabbits. If your rabbit has a soiled backend either through diarrhoea or poor hygiene flies will lay their eggs here. If you have an elderly or overweight rabbit, they cannot always clean this area and so are at increased risk. Fly eggs hatch out into maggots which will feed on the skin and tissue in this area, if left untreated will be fatal. It is advisable to check your rabbit's backend at least twice a day and if required bath your rabbit to remove any soiling and dry well. Clean the toileting area daily. Products like Rearguard® can help prevent flies from laying eggs on your rabbit.

Remember although rabbits can be extremely rewarding as pets, rabbits require a lot of care and do not make good Easter presents.

Learn more. Search for 'RSPCA Rabbits' for advice, tips and health information.

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Chocolate!

At this time of year with Easter fast approaching there is more chocolate around and this is very tempting to our pets.

Chocolate contains a product called theobromine which is toxic to dogs and cats. Dark chocolate contains a higher concentration of theobromine than milk chocolate. If eaten chocolate can cause vomiting, diarrhoea and dehydration. It can also cause our pets to become hyperactive, develop hyperthermia and in severe cases fit. Therefore, keep Easter eggs out of reach of your pets. Treatment involves inducing vomiting and in severe cases fluid therapy may also be required.

If you think or know your pet has eaten any chocolate, please contact the surgery immediately.

Emergency Service. In an emergency, call 01395 512611
Learn more online ottervets.co.uk/emergency

Parasites

Common parasites affect our pets all year around. These include fleas, ticks and worms. Therefore, it is important to regularly treat your pets every month.

Fleas

These have 4 life stages, 3 of these stages, egg, larvae and pupae all take place in the environment either outside or in our homes. It is only the 4th stage - adult where the fleas jump onto our pets to feed and breed. In addition to treating your pet every month if you see fleas then treating the house is essential as 95% of the flea lifecycle is off the pet.

Ticks

These also have a 4-stage lifecycle but only attach to our pets to feed. The tick species usually found in the UK do not live in our houses, but one species commonly found in Europe – the Brown Dog Tick which now occurs here, does and once a house is infested it is very difficult and expensive to clear.

Worms

Dogs and cats can get worm burdens in a number of different ways and this depends on the type of worm.

Roundworms are passed to puppies and kittens from their mothers via the placenta or milk. Adult dogs are exposed in local parks as the eggs passed

in infected dog faeces remain in the soil and are then ingested. Cats can become infected by eating wildlife that ingested roundworm eggs.

Tapeworms their lifecycle involves the flea so when grooming if our pets ingest an infected flea they become infected with tapeworm.

Lungworm is transmitted when your pet eats small snails, quite often these are ingested when they eat grass.

Treatment

There are a confusing range of spot-on and oral treatments available for our pets, our reception and nursing staff are happy to discuss which products are most suitable for your pet and its lifestyle. As recent studies have revealed that many spot-on treatments are washed off when our dogs go into rivers, ponds and streams and affect the stability of our watercourses, it may be advisable to use tablet form.

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