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## Vaccinating your Rabbit

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As with any pets, your rabbit should be vaccinated against diseases to ensure they live a long and healthy life. We can vaccinate against Myxomatosis and Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease in a single combined vaccine. This can be given from 5 weeks of age and should be given annually.

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## Neutering your Rabbit

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There are many advantages of neutering your rabbit. For female rabbits it prevents unwanted pregnancies, false pregnancies, and nest building. It also prevents uterine cancer which is common in old age. For both sexes, it reduces aggressive behaviour towards other rabbits (and humans).

Both sexes can be neutered from 4 months of age. It is important to remember though that a male rabbit can remain fertile for up to eight weeks after the procedure, so they should not be kept with an un-neutered female during this time.

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## Handling your Rabbit

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Regular interaction and handling can help to stimulate your rabbit and reduce anxiety when being held. This allows you to check your rabbit's general condition, and alert you to any health problems, such as overgrown teeth and nails.

Move slowly and talk quietly around rabbits so as not to startle them. They're more likely to be relaxed in a quiet and calm handling environment. Safety is paramount when handling rabbits, as their fragile spines can be seriously, or even fatally, damaged if they feel insecure and struggle when held. It is best to make sure there is always an adult or responsible person present if children are going to be handling the rabbit.

Picking rabbits up when you're close to ground level is less likely to scare them, and is also safer, as it helps prevent them from being dropped from a height by accident. We advise all interactions to take place on ground level when possible. Covering their eyes with a towel or in the crook of your arm can help them feel more relaxed while being held, but you should ensure their nostrils and ears aren't covered.

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## Housing for your Rabbit

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Your rabbit's environment should consist of a hutch or house with separate toilet and sleeping areas, as well as somewhere they can burrow or dig. A hutch should be dry and well insulated and kept at a cool temperature. It should be covered with bedding, which could be hay, straw or dust-free wood chippings. It should be large enough to allow your rabbit to at least stand up on its hind legs and long enough to allow it to take 3 or 4 hops in either direction. Rabbits should also have access to a secure outside run. The run should be covered from above, as rabbits are at risk of being taken as prey by wild animals. Toys to stimulate your rabbit, such as plastic tunnels and plant pots help to make your rabbit's life more interesting. The hutch should be protected from the sun, rain, frost, and ideally raised a few feet off the ground to protect it from predators.

Rabbits are clean animals, and require a separate toilet area within the hutch, ideally a litter tray, which should be deep-sided and filled with wood chippings which is regularly replaced. Rabbits are social animals and should ideally be kept in pairs of a similar size. They should never be kept with guinea pigs as they tend to bully them and have different feeding requirements.

Some people prefer to keep their rabbits as house pets, choosing for them to live indoors and never go outside, whereas some prefer to keep them outdoors in a hutch as outdoor rabbits. Rabbits can be trained to use a litter tray so they make good, clean house pets. Rabbits can be perfectly happy living either lifestyle if certain precautions are taken:

### Indoor Rabbits

- 🐰 Make sure your house is rabbit proofed. Rabbits love to chew through wires and cables, so they must be protected to avoid injury.
- 🐰 If your rabbit is too warm, it will be more prone to gaining weight as they do not need to burn off the calories to maintain heat. The hutch should be kept in a cool, but not cold, area.
- 🐰 Try to avoid access to wooden or laminate floors, as rabbits cannot grip these and are liable to slip and injure themselves.

### Outdoor Rabbits

- 🐰 Make sure your garden is free of poisonous plants such as bluebells, carnations, daffodils and ivy (this is not a comprehensive list)
- 🐰 Outdoor rabbits can become stressed through fear of predators, so try to minimise cases where this may be a problem. For example, if your neighbour has a dog, keep your rabbit in an area where it cannot see it.

## Contact Information

Telephone (24 hour Emergency Line): 01472 347054

Telephone (Office hours): 01472 362821

Telephone (Office hours): 01472 240422

## Common Rabbit Poisons you Should be Aware Of

- 🐰 House plants: it is safest to presume that all house plants are toxic to your rabbit. This is because there is a huge variety, and this makes it impossible to list them all. Keep all houseplants out of reach of rabbits, ideally in separate rooms.
- 🐰 Garden plants: any bulb growing plant should be kept away from your rabbits' grazing area. This includes snowdrops, hyacinths, bluebells, crocuses, daffodils, and tulips. Likewise, buttercups, foxgloves, primrose, delphiniums/larkspur, columbine (aquilegia) hellebore, comfrey, poppy, periwinkle, monkshood, rhubarb, nightshade, ivy, privet, holly and yew are all reasonably common garden plants, and all are toxic. Look around your garden and remove any of these plants that you find, or make sure they are out of reach.
- 🐰 Herbicides: many herbicides contain glyphosate which is poisonous to rabbits, other chemicals in individuals products may also be toxic. Rabbits can ingest enough of this poison if they eat grass of plants that have recently been sprayed with herbicide.
- 🐰 Rat Bait: if you think your rabbit has eaten rat bait and you have the packing, please bring it with you to the vets as different rat poisons have different effects. These can cause severe problems so it is important to treat quickly.
- 🐰 Lead: licking or chewing at certain household items, such as lead containing paint, can be enough to give your rabbit lead poisoning. Luckily lead can no longer be legally included in paints, but may still be present in older houses.
- 🐰 Flea products: do not use cat or dog flea products on your rabbit as these can be poisonous. If your cat or dog has had a spot-on product applied, keep your rabbit away from physical contact with them for 48 hours.



# Caring For Your New Rabbit!

Congratulations on getting your new rabbit, here are some rabbit care tips for you to follow so you can keep your rabbit healthy and happy.

## Feeding your Rabbit

The most important part of your rabbit's diet is HAY. Plenty of fresh hay should be given daily. Good quality forage has many benefits, including:

- 🐰 Maintaining healthy teeth. Rabbit's teeth grow 2-3mm a week, so chewing forage helps keep them ground down.
- 🐰 Keeping the gut healthy. The high levels of fibre found in forage are vital for healthy digestion.
- 🐰 Preventing boredom. Foraging in hay will help keep your rabbit entertained. You can further encourage foraging by adding special herb mixes to the hay.

As well as forage, your rabbit should be fed on a complete pellet food which contains the optimum balance of nutrients. Avoid feeding muesli mixes, as rabbits have a tendency to pick out the bits they like and leave the rest, missing out on vital nutrients. It is natural behaviour for your rabbit to eat its own faeces. This usually occurs at night and is known as 'coprophagia' and is an important part of normal digestive function.

Make sure your rabbit always has access to fresh water.

A few greens e.g. dandelion leaves, fresh vegetables and fruit add variety to a rabbit's diet, but please avoid human food e.g. biscuits, weetabix and ryvita.

