

## RABBIT CARE

### Vital Statistics

Life expectancy	6 – 14years	Adult body weight	2- 6kg
Breeding	4 – 10months	Pregnancy	31days
Litter Size	1 -12	Weaning	4 – 6weeks

**Rabbits** can make ideal loving pets. They have special needs that must be met to enable them to live a happy and healthy life. There are a wide variety of rabbit breeds. It is important to familiarise yourself with what a rabbit needs & what you are able to provide. There are many aspects to housing, feeding, handling, health & veterinary care to consider.

### Housing

- A hutch should serve as a temporary enclosure only. It needs to be safe & secure for the rabbit & provide protection from predators. It should be large enough to allow the rabbit to exhibit its normal behaviours. All pet rabbits should be given the opportunity to exercise outside of the hutch for a few hours each day
- Hutches should be easy to clean. Remove soiled bedding daily & totally clean the hutch at least once weekly
- If kept outdoors ensure that the hutch is rain proof & avoid extreme weather conditions. Rabbits can succumb to heat stroke very readily in hot weather. Hutches need to be well ventilated. Mosquito proof the hutch using fly-screen wire
- Wild rabbits live in burrows underground. The burrow is a 'safe' place for rabbits to be. Ideally a similar form of 'safe' place should be provided for your rabbit at home. A frightened rabbit will 'bolt' into its burrow if it feels threatened. At home this 'burrow' can be simulated in the form of an upturned box or a covered corner of the room. By providing these 'bolt holes' rabbits may feel more secure in their environment. More security = less stress = healthier rabbit!
- Newly acquired rabbits are more susceptible to the changes in their environment & can get digestive upsets at this time. Feed them their 'usual' diet when you first acquire them
- Suitable bedding includes hay, straw, shredded paper etc. An all wire floor is unsuitable. Change bedding regularly
- When rabbits are indoors, be aware of them chewing electrical cords & furniture! Rabbit proof your home!
- If you intend to keep more than one rabbit (which is recommended as rabbits are sociable animals), suitable mixes include 2 females, male & female (if you want many kits!) or mixes of neutered rabbits
- It is not advisable to mix guinea pigs with rabbits as guinea pigs can get diseases from rabbits. Also their dietary requirements differ and they may bully each other
- You can toilet train a rabbit, they soon learn to use a litter tray or particular area to defecate & urinate in. Suitable litter materials include hay, straw, some cat litters (avoid clay types)
- Provide rabbits with 'play time' – toys can be wooden toys/cardboard boxes to chew & boxes etc to crawl around in. Try hiding treat items amongst boxes and hay
- Exercise is important. Allow rabbits to exercise freely. This promotes good physical & mental health. Provide your rabbit with access to unfiltered natural sunlight regularly

### Feeding

- Feeding is very important to pet rabbit health, please refer to '**Feeding recommendations for pet rabbits**' notes

### Handling

- Rabbits may enjoy being **patted & handled**, ideally start handling a rabbit from a young age
- When handling a rabbit, support the fore & hind quarters from underneath rather than holding them from around the belly & chest. **NEVER** hold a rabbit from its ears!
- Rabbits are scared of heights, and often don't like to be 'picked up'. It is often safer to hold a rabbit on your lap whilst sitting at ground level
- Rabbits can kick out very strongly with their legs & scratch you & also cause themselves serious injury in doing so
- Be sure to wash your hands after handling your rabbit. It is also wise to ensure that your hands don't carry odours of other animals before you handle your rabbit as this may frighten them

### Health & Veterinary Care

- Have any newly acquired rabbit checked by a vet, especially if you intend to mix the rabbit with others!
- Coats may require regular grooming & nails may need occasional clipping
- Your vet will also be able to advise you on vaccination against the fatal & incurable viral disease; **Rabbit Calici Virus**
- **Desexing** is recommended between 5-6 months of age for both does and bucks. It is essential to have female rabbits desexed (even if they live alone) due to extremely high rates of reproductive tract cancer. Desexing may also help prevent other diseases & reduce territorial soiling of your house & other behavioural problems.
- Pet health insurance is more widely available nowadays and is worth considering for your pet rabbit
- Always monitor closely your rabbits food intake, body condition, eyes, ears, mouth, feet & toileting behaviour

### Information resources

- For books '**Rabbits for Dummies**'. Internet; American house rabbit society [www.Rabbit.org](http://www.Rabbit.org)