



## RABBIT INFORMATION

Rabbits can make very enjoyable pets. If you are thinking of getting a pet rabbit or have already got one here is some information on how to provide the best care and environment for your pet.

### HOUSING

Rabbits can be kept indoors or outdoors. House rabbits should be given an enclosure where they can be left unsupervised as they may chew wires and furniture when in the rest of the house. Exercise around the house should be encouraged but always supervised. A bedding area should be provided within the rabbit's enclosure which should be either paper or wood based. Providing toys and chewable objects such as cardboard boxes will provide hours of entertainment for your bunny. Rabbits can be trained to use a litter tray but you may still find the odd dropping on the carpet!

If kept outdoors your rabbit will need a cage to provide some protection from the wind, rain and to provide shade on sunny days. The hutch should be raised off the ground and should have a waterproof roof. If there is a large mesh-fronted area you may need to provide a cover over this in very bad weather. If your rabbit will be spending a large amount of time in its hutch it will need to be big enough for at least 3 hops from one end to the other and high enough for the rabbit to stand up on its hind legs. As with an indoor rabbit an enclosed area should be provided for exercise and play and again toys and chewable objects should be provided. Rabbits can burrow and jump very high so precautions need to be taken to ensure the run is secure.

### VACCINATIONS

Just like dogs and cats, rabbits also need vaccinations against infectious diseases they are at risk from. This also provides a valuable opportunity for your rabbit to have a health check with one of our vets. Rabbits receive vaccinations against myxomatosis and viral haemorrhagic disease.

- **Myxomatosis;** This is an often fatal disease of rabbits. It is spread by fleas, biting flies, mosquitoes and direct contact. As fleas can be brought into the house this puts indoor rabbits at risk as well as outdoor ones. The first signs are a discharge from the eyes, the rabbit will become lethargic and inappetent and will soon develop swollen eyelids, lips, genitals and have discharges from these orifices. Some rabbits may die within 48 hours of signs developing and so if you have any concerns seek immediate veterinary advice. The vaccination gives protection for 6 months and so should be repeated twice a year.
- **Viral haemorrhagic disease;** This is another fatal disease which is spread by direct or indirect contact from other affected rabbits. The virus can be spread through contaminated surfaces and objects which makes both indoor and outdoor rabbits susceptible. Symptoms include a fever, lethargy, collapse and inappetance. Again the disease progresses very quickly to death. The vaccination must be done once a year and should not be done within 2 weeks of giving the myxomatosis vaccine.

## **DIET**

Feeding your rabbit the correct diet is essential for keeping him or her healthy and to reduce the chance of them developing dental disease. The ideal diet is one which is as close to their natural diet as possible, this means the bulk of their diet should be made up of grass or hay. Your rabbit should be given as much of this as they want and it should be available to them all day. Only fresh grass should be offered. Green leafy foods are another important component of your rabbit's diet. A variety should be used including wild plants such as dandelion leaves. If your rabbit is not used to this make sure you introduce it slowly to avoid them getting diarrhoea. A small amount of commercial concentrate pellets can be offered but this should be a limited amount so that the rabbit will not leave its hay or grass. Commercial diets of which the pellets are all the same are preferable so that the rabbit cannot pick out only the tastiest bits. A rough guide to the amount of pellets to feed is 25g per kg bodyweight per day. Commercially available treats should be avoided but the odd treat of small amounts of fruit or fresh vegetables can be given occasionally. Any changes to your rabbit's diet should be done gradually, over 1-2 weeks. Fresh drinking water should always be available from either a bowl or a drinking bottle which can be easier to keep clean.

## **NEUTERING**

Rabbits are social animals and prefer to be kept with a companion when possible. If two rabbits of opposite sex are kept together we recommend neutering one or both of them to prevent breeding, this includes littermates. If two males are kept together they will need to be neutered as they are likely to fight. Two females may tolerate each other if given enough space but again may fight. The most stable pairing is to have a neutered male and a neutered female. Neutering prevents unwanted pregnancies and reduces aggressive behaviour and spraying of urine in the house. In females neutering eradicates the risk of developing uterine diseases and cancer which are common in older female rabbits, it also greatly reduces the risk of mammary cancer later in life. The recommended age for neutering is 4 to 6 months and males are sterile approximately 4-6 weeks after the procedure has been done.

## **WORMING AND FLEA CONTROL**

Common diseases- fly strike, dental disease, ileus,