

## **RABBIT HEALTH**

We always suggest taking your rabbit to a rabbit knowledgeable vet for a well check up at least once a year. It is important to find a vet who treats a lot of rabbits and who stays up to date with the latest treatments. You can find vet referrals on our [website](#), plus a list of questions and answers to ask a vet if you are not sure if they are rabbit knowledgeable.

### ***Spay & Neuter***

It is very important to have your rabbit spayed or neutered to prevent health and behavior problems. Even if you just have one rabbit make sure you get this done. We suggest doing it at about five to six months old.

### ***GI Stasis***

Please read our separate handout about [GI Stasis](#). This problem can be related to diet, or can occur because of an underlying illness. If you know how to recognize it you can save your rabbits' life.

### ***Eating, Drinking, Pooping and Peeing***

It is important to know your rabbits eating, drinking, pooping and peeing habits. If your rabbit ever stops eating or drinking, is drinking more or less than normal, or if your rabbit stops using the litter box, is straining to urinate or the urine is sludgy, you must take your rabbit to a rabbit knowledgeable vet right away.

Check your rabbits litter box everyday to make sure there is the normal amount of poop for your rabbit in there, and that the poop is the right size and consistency.

### ***Ears***

It is important to check inside your rabbits ears for wax or debris build up, or infection. Smell inside the ear to make sure there is not a yeasty or bad smell. Look inside the ear to make sure it is nice and clean

### ***Feet***

Check the bottom of your rabbit's feet for sore hocks. These are patches of skin where the fur has worn away, often from being on a wire bottom cage or a hard surface. They can be come very sore, swollen and infected, and must be treated right away.

### ***Fur and Skin***

Check the fur and skin for white flakes or tiny black dots. If you notice either of these your rabbit probably has mites (white flakes) or fleas (black dots).

### ***Teeth***

Rabbit's teeth continually grow. The front teeth must be lined up correctly in order for them to be kept trim. The cheek teeth must also be lined up; sometimes rabbits can grow molar spurs or have other teeth problems such as impaction and abscesses. If you ever notice your rabbit drooling, having trouble eating, or having a runny eye this could be a sign of a tooth problem and the rabbit must be seen by a rabbit vet. Some rabbits

have malocclusion where the teeth don't line up. In most cases the teeth will have to be trimmed or filed, in some cases they have to be removed. It is VERY important that you find an expert in this field who has a lot of experience with rabbit teeth.

### ***Body***

Run your hands over your rabbit's whole body, including head and jaw area to check for any unusual lumps or bumps. Rabbits can often get abscesses which need to be treated right away. The sooner you notice a problem and get it treated the better the chance you have for a good recovery.

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## **BEHAVIOR**

Rabbits get bored if left with nothing to do, so you must provide them with bunny safe toys. These may include baby rattles (not the teething type), cardboard rolls from the inside of paper towel or toilet paper rolls, balls, untreated wicker baskets stuffed with hay and cardboard boxes (no tape or staples). Call The Bunny Bunch for toys available through our Bunny Bunch Boutique, 909-548-0034.

Rabbits do much better in pairs and with the proper introduction they will bond for life. Rabbits are very territorial and bonding rabbits must be done very carefully in a neutral territory for about 10 minutes a day. You can call us for our information sheet on Bunny Bonding for more details. Make sure your rabbits are spayed or neutered before starting the bonding process.

Chewing is necessary for rabbits as their teeth grow continuously so they need to be provided with bunny safe wooden chews at all times. Your rabbit will chew on other items such as furniture, electrical cords and just about anything left in it's path, so be sure to bunny proof and not leave anything on the floor you do not want chewed. To stop your bunny from chewing on your furniture clap your hands and move your bunny away. Spaying and neutering also helps with behavioral problems. Your bunny should never be punished or put in his cage for bad behavior.

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## **GROOMING**

Rabbits are meticulous groomers, but they will need some help from you. It is very important to brush your rabbit on a daily basis to remove any loose fur, especially when they are shedding.

### ***Trimming the Nails***

Rabbit's nails grow continuously so they will need to be trimmed about every four to six weeks. It is important to know how to trim a rabbit's nails, because if you cut them down too short you may cut into the quick which will be very painful and bleed. This can also lead to infection. We do free nail trims at our weekend adoption events and at the

Burrow and will be happy to show you how to trim nails. A rabbit vet can also show you as well.

### ***Scent Glands***

Male and female rabbits have two scent glands on either side of the genitals. These are two small pockets which need to be cleaned about every three months or so. When cleaning the scent glands it is important to be gentle. We suggest using a q-tip dipped in warm water to gently wipe out the debris.

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### **PLEASE SPAY AND NEUTER!**

At The Bunny Bunch all rabbits are spayed or neutered before adoption, and this is for a number of reasons. The biggest reason is to prevent unwanted litters (the Humane Societies are full of unwanted rabbits being euthanized due to lack of homes). Also, for health and behavioral problems. Unneutered males and sometimes unspayed females will spray urine to mark their territory, some will show aggressive behavior and there are many health risks, such as cancer, related to unfixed rabbits. Help us stop over population by spaying/neutering your rabbit. Call The Bunny Bunch Hotline for low cost spay and neuter referrals.

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### **HOLDING YOUR RABBIT**

Never pick a bunny up by its ears! You must support its back legs and hold it against your chest. Young children should not be allowed to pick up a rabbit as the rabbit has powerful back legs and can scratch very deeply. Also a rabbit can break its own back by struggling if it is held incorrectly. Have children sit on the couch or floor and let the bunny come to them. Always supervise!

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### **LIVING QUARTERS**

Rabbits should live inside your house with you, as part of the family. Rabbits should never be kept in a hutch, and most cages are too small for a rabbit to live in. Keep in mind that rabbits need just as much exercise as a cat or dog and must have room to run around. Some rabbits live free in the house. The house must be rabbit proofed, meaning all cords are covered or out of reach, no poisonous plants, no animals or children that can harm them and no way to get out. Some live in a rabbit proofed room, and some live in an exercise pen and are let out for exercise in a rabbit proofed room or house. Keep in mind that the smallest space a rabbit can live in is 4ftx4ft square. Small rabbits need just as much room to run around as large rabbits do.

### ***Litterbox***

Rabbits will easily train themselves to use a litter box. Just provide a large litter box with rabbit safe litter, such as Carefresh and pile hay on top. Rabbits like to graze and poop

at the same time so keeping hay in the litter box gets them to use it and to eat more hay.

### ***Toys & Chews***

Because rabbit's teeth are continually growing they need a lot of items to chew. Make sure whatever you provide for your rabbit to chew on is rabbit safe. Chew blocks, untreated willow baskets, willow balls, willow wreaths and untreated apple twigs all make great chews. Rabbits also like to play, some favorite rabbit toys are balls with a bell inside, baby keys and rattles. Rabbits like to have a hiding place to lie in or under such as a bunny tent or cardboard box.

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## **PROPER DIET**

A rabbit's diet should be made up of unlimited grass type hay, fresh veggies and limited pellets. Only healthy treats should be fed. It is a good idea to split the veggies and pellet rations into two feedings, morning and evening. Hay must be available at all times.

### ***Hay***

Hay is a very important part of a rabbit's diet. It should be piled in the litter box at all times as rabbits like to poop and graze at the same time. Hay is the main source of fiber and helps in preventing GI stasis, plus it is good for keeping the teeth trim. Rabbits will start munching on hay at about two to three weeks of age. Adult rabbits should be fed grass hays such as Timothy, Bunny Bunch Blend or Oat. Baby rabbits can eat alfalfa. Hay cubes should NOT be fed in place of loose hay. [Read more about Hay below.](#)

### ***Pellets***

Adult rabbits should be fed a good quality, high fiber (20% or more), alfalfa pellet, or Timothy pellet (we feed Timothy pellets). Feed only  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a cup a day for a 5 lbs rabbit. Rabbits that are free fed pellets tend to become overweight and will not eat as much hay. Young rabbits should be free fed pellets up to about seven or eight months, then slowly cut back to what is correct for their weight. Never feed pellets that have nuts, seeds or cereal looking items added in, these are high in sugar and carbohydrates.

### ***Veggies***

Veggies should be fed twice a day in the form of a bunny salad. Feed about three cups of veggies per day for a 5 lb rabbit. The salad should be made up of about three different kinds of fresh, washed, pesticide free vegetables such as parsley, cilantro, bok choy, endive, escarole and dandelion greens. Rabbits should be introduced to veggies at about three to four months old, starting with one kind of veggie and slowly adding in others a few days apart.

### ***Fruit***

Rabbits can have a limited amount of fruit in their diet such as strawberries, blueberries, apples, melon, pineapple, papaya and peach (no seeds or pits). Only feed it a couple of

times a week and not more than a tablespoon for an average size rabbit. Some fruits can be very high in sugar such as banana and grapes so it is best to avoid those. Feed fruit sparingly, just once in a while as a treat.

### ***Treats***

Never feed nuts, cereal, crackers, cookies or any other kind of snack food to your rabbits. All of these are high in sugar and carbohydrates, and should not be part of a rabbit's diet. Healthy treats can be fed such as fresh dried pesticide free herbs, rabbit safe flowers such as rose petals, hibiscus and nasturtiums.

### ***Water***

Fresh water should be available at all times, in a clean, large, heavy crock. Rinse the water crock out every day and give it a good cleaning about three times a week to prevent algae build up.

## **HAY! HOW ABOUT HAY!**

A rabbit's diet is very important. Many people tend to feed the wrong pellets and not enough hay. And store-bought treats that can be very harmful to rabbits. Unfortunately, there are a lot of unhealthy items out there that are made for rabbits and marketed towards their humans, making the treats and pellets look like candy. The bad thing is that these items are often full of sugar, which can cause health problems in rabbits and can even be deadly.

At The Bunny Bunch we have cared for rabbits for over twenty years and have discovered the best diet for optimal health.

Hay plays a very important part in a rabbit's diet and should be provided at all times. It is very important that you have a good reliable source for getting hay for your rabbits.

Hay should be fed unlimited (meaning as much as your rabbit wants) on a daily basis. We pile the litter boxes full of hay every morning and evening so our buns will get as much hay as they want. Hay can also be put into hay baskets in your rabbit's pen, or around the house for extra munching. **Hay is one of the most important parts of a rabbit's diet.** Make sure your rabbit is eating lots of hay! If you are overfeeding pellets your rabbit will not eat as much hay, so make sure you are limiting pellets and giving the right amount based on your rabbit's weight.

We do not suggest putting hay in hay racks. While rabbits will pull at the hay and eat it, the hay consumption tends to be much less.

### ***Why Hay?***

Rabbits need lots of fiber to keep their GI tract healthy. Hay plays an important part in keeping the intestinal tract moving. Rabbits (unlike cats) cannot vomit, so everything must pass through their GI tract. One of the most common rabbit illnesses is "GI Stasis",

which occurs when the GI tract slows down or stops. You will often hear that a rabbit has a hairball, which slowed down the GI tract. The fact is, the GI tract slowed down before the hairball. Because the GI tract slowed down, the hair and other food particles did not move through the intestines or stomach, causing the rabbit pain. Rabbits in GI stasis can die within twelve hours. (Click [here](#) to read our article on GI Stasis for more important information). Eating unlimited hay and a healthy diet can help to prevent this illness.

If you notice that your rabbit has small poops, large poops, misshapen poops, soft poops or poops that have a bad smell, go to a rabbit vet right away. Often, these are signs of not enough hay or a poor diet. Your rabbit should see a rabbit savvy veterinarian right away as these signs could also be the result of an underlying illness or parasites.

### ***Types of Hay***

*Timothy* -This is a great hay to be fed unlimited on a daily basis. Lots of nice stems with great color and smell.

*Bunny Bunch Blend™* -This is a blend of delicious Oat, Wheat and Barley. Our buns go crazy over it!

*Oat* -Another one the buns love. Lots of seed heads for munching on.

*Orchard* -A softer, fine hay that rabbits enjoy. We often give a handful as a treat.

*Alfalfa* -This hay is for the young ones only. Good for growing buns that need calcium for strong bones and teeth. We do not recommend giving this to adults, though.

### ***How to store hay***

Hay should be stored in a cool, dry, dark location. It is very important to make sure your hay does not get damp or wet, as this could cause mold to grow, which is life threatening to rabbits and other small animals.

Hay should not be stored in an airtight container as it needs air to circulate. If you go through your hay pretty quickly (which most of us do), you can store it in a hay bin with a loose lid. Or, you may want to store it in a large cardboard box. If your hay is in a plastic bag, do not seal the bag; leave the top open.

If you have cats, make sure they do not have access to the stored hay, as they often like to use it as a litter box.