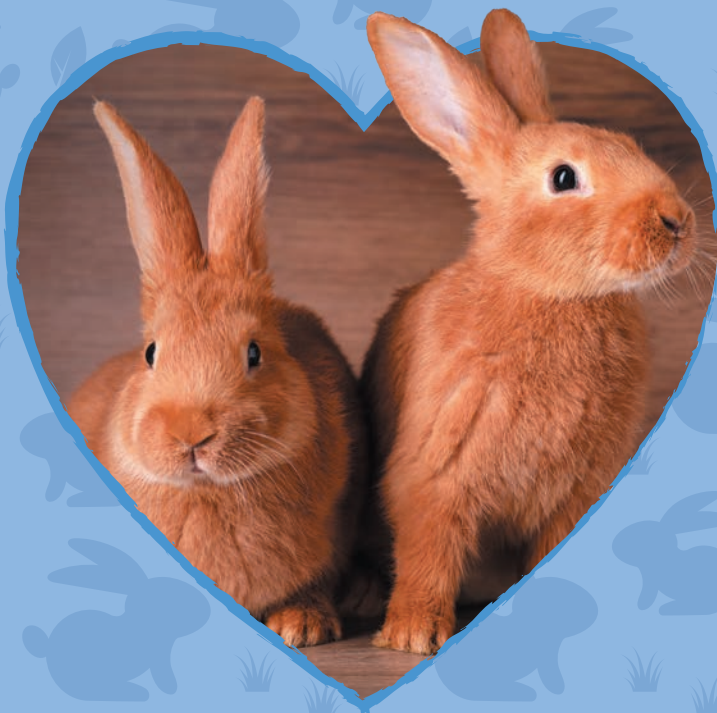


Burgess<sup>™</sup>  
SINCE 1790  
*Excel*



THE FIVE RABBIT  
WELFARE NEEDS

[WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM](http://WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM)

STAMPING OUT  
SELECTIVE FEEDING  
MUESLI  
**FREE**  
Co.

# BURGESS PET CARE

## A BRITISH FAMILY COMPANY

Burgess Pet Care is a British family company with a 300-year heritage. With our passion and expert knowledge we have been able to develop high quality and nutritious foods for a variety of animals from dogs to hamsters.

Our Excel brand was established in 1998 when we became the first company to make single component extruded nuggets for rabbits. In 2014 we supported research by the University of Edinburgh which highlighted the impact of muesli style diets on the health of rabbits. As a result of this research we stopped making muesli for all animals.



## RABBIT AWARENESS WEEK

Every year we run our Rabbit Awareness Week campaign which helps to educate rabbit owners and potential owners about the welfare needs of these wonderful animals.

We have written this booklet to help you to meet your rabbits' welfare needs and keep them happy and healthy.

If you have any further questions please contact us at [consumercare@burgesspetcare.co.uk](mailto:consumercare@burgesspetcare.co.uk)



# THE FIVE RABBIT WELFARE NEEDS

**WELCOME TO RAW'S GUIDE TO CARING FOR YOUR RABBITS.**

Please read through this guide and keep it handy for reference.

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# INTRODUCTION TO RABBITS



## RABBIT FACT FILE



LIFE EXPECTANCY:	8-12 YEARS
RABBIT NAMES:	MALE – BUCK FEMALE – DOE YOUNG – KITTEN
ANIMAL FAMILY:	LAGOMORPHA/LEPORIDAE
BEHAVIOUR:	MORE ACTIVE AT NIGHT & AT DAWN AND DUSK
DIET:	HERBIVORES, OR AS WE LIKE TO CALL THEM 'FIBREVORES'
HOBBIES:	BURROWING, 'BINKYING', GROOMING & PLAYING WITH OTHER RABBITS

# OWNING RABBITS

Rabbits are lovely animals to keep for more than just a few reasons:

**Lively** - Rabbits are extremely energetic creatures and they're great to watch running and jumping around.

**Social** - Rabbits are extremely sociable and highly intelligent. When looked after correctly and provided with both bunny friends and a caring owner, they can become fantastic companions.

**Clean** - They are great at keeping themselves clean and can even be litter trained!

If you're thinking of keeping rabbits it's important that you understand the commitments involved. Many people get rabbits as they believe they are 'easy' to look after. However, rabbits require a high level of both monetary investment and commitment from their owners. They also have complex dietary needs. We recommend getting some advice from a vet or a local rescue if you are thinking of keeping rabbits. If you do choose to get rabbits we'd really recommend that you adopt from a rescue centre such as Blue Cross, RSPCA, RWA, SSPCA, Raystede or Woodgreen The Animals Charity where you'll get great advice on how to look after your bunnies.



## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I TAKE MY RABBITS TO THE VET?

You should take your rabbits for a veterinary check-up every 6-12 months and check that they are eating correctly and passing plenty of droppings every day. Rabbits are a prey animal so will hide signs of ill-health which makes regular vet visits really important in order to help avoid illness.

## SHOULD I MICROCHIP MY RABBITS?

You should always microchip your rabbits where possible to ensure that if they get lost they can be identified and returned to you.

## WHAT SHOULD I DO IF ONE OF MY RABBITS IS ACTING DIFFERENTLY?

If one of your rabbits shows a change in behaviour or in their eating or drinking patterns you should seek the advice of a vet as soon as possible.

## SHOULD I INSURE MY RABBITS?

You should insure your rabbits to help manage costs to ensure they receive the veterinary care that they need.

## SHOULD I NEUTER MY RABBITS?

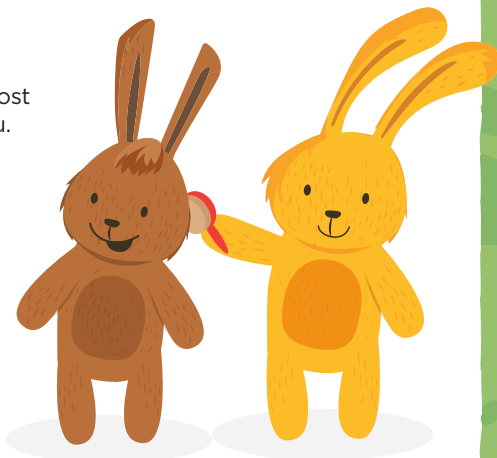
You should neuter your rabbits to avoid unwanted litters. Additionally, up to 80% of un-neutered female rabbits can develop cancer of the uterus by 5 years, neutering at an early age will stop these cancers developing. Un-neutered males can be aggressive to other rabbits, whereas neutered rabbits can live happily with male and female rabbits.

## SHOULD I WASH MY RABBITS?

You should never drench your rabbits with water as the water makes them feel vulnerable. You should however, groom your rabbits daily if possible, which will help get them used to being handled and is a good opportunity to check for signs of ill-health.

Rabbits' skin is very delicate and therefore you should use soft, delicate brushes, where possible designed especially for rabbits: [rabbitwelfare.co.uk](http://rabbitwelfare.co.uk) has lots of detailed information about how to groom your rabbits and which tools to use. A daily check of your rabbits' bottoms is recommended to make sure that they are clean. This is especially important in warm weather due to the risk of fly strike. If you do find sticky droppings on your rabbits' bottom, gently wash them off the affected area and ensure that it is dried thoroughly.

You should also check your rabbits' nails on a weekly basis and seek veterinary advice if they need trimming.



## WHAT ARE THE COMMON PROBLEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR?

Many of the common problems seen in rabbits develop from rabbits being fed an inappropriate diet. It is extremely important that you make sure your rabbit is fed correctly to help avoid health problems. A list of the key problems often seen in rabbits is below:



### Fly Strike

Flystrike occurs when flies lay eggs on a rabbit, usually around the rear, which hatch into maggots and eat the flesh of the rabbit. Flystrike can often be a sign of an underlying health problem, such as obesity, resulting in wet fur or an accumulation of sticky droppings (caecotrophs) around their bottom.

If you think your rabbits have flystrike then you should seek veterinary assistance immediately. There are some fly repellents designed for rabbits, however the best way to prevent flystrike is to ensure your rabbit is at a healthy weight, in good health generally and by checking them every day in the winter and twice a day in warm weather.



### Dental Disease

Dental disease is the most common health problem found in rabbits.

Read more on page 27



### Gut Stasis

Gut stasis is a condition where a rabbit's digestive system slows down or stops. This can result in a buildup of gas and toxins which can be fatal to the affected rabbit.

Be aware of the signs of stasis:

- Slowed or absent faecal output
- Tense abdomen, pain or bloating
- Posture changes

If you spot any of these signs, seek advice from your veterinary practice.

An increased risk of gut stasis is linked to selective feeding and reduced hay intake which can occur when rabbits are fed muesli based diets.



### Myxomatosis/VHD

These are life-threatening diseases and you should vaccinate your rabbits against them as soon as possible.

Read more on page 24



## OBESITY

### ABOUT THE CONDITION

Just like humans, rabbits can easily become obese due to incorrect diet and lack of exercise. Obesity is very serious for rabbits, not only because it impacts their quality of life but because it is also linked to problems such as gut stasis and fly strike.

### SIGNS OF OBESITY

Rabbits are seen as fluffy and cuddly, this general view can be detrimental when it comes to keeping track of their weight. It is good practice to often reference the UK Pet Food Rabbit Size-O-Meter and give your rabbit regular body checks. You may also notice that they have their caecatrophes (sticky droppings) stuck to their fur around their bottom, a sign that they are too overweight to eat these directly from their bottoms which is a natural rabbit behaviour and paramount to their health.

### CAUSES

Being over fed and then forced to remain stationary is the main reason for obesity. In the wild rabbits run up to three football pitches a day, but too often owners keep them contained in cramped cages or without constant access to a large run to exercise in.

### PREVENTION

The best way to prevent obesity is by ensuring your rabbits are eating the correct diet (85-90% grass or feeding hay, a small supplement of high fibre nuggets and a handful of leafy fresh greens) and by following the feeding guides on packaging.

It is also important that your rabbits have plenty of space to exercise and constant access to a large run.

### TREATMENT

If you think your rabbit may be obese it is advised to visit your vets and ask them to devise a weight loss programme.

Changing your rabbits diet should be done gradually so not to upset their



How do you decide if your rabbit is the correct weight? Domestic rabbits vary immensely in body shape just like dogs do: think of the difference between a greyhound and a Labrador and you start getting the picture.

sensitive digestive system, a four week period is usually advised. As well as their diet, giving your rabbit more space to exercise should help them shift some weight. Engaging with them and making them work for their food and providing enrichment aids such as willow balls stuffed with hay will keep your rabbits entertained and burning calories that they would not when eating food from a bowl.

You could try our Better Bunny Programme at the centre of this book and see how it helps.

### PROGNOSIS

If obesity is treated quickly, rabbits have a good chance of living a happier and longer life.

### BODY CONDITION SCORE

Vets will use a Body Condition score to assess your rabbit's weight and to determine how overweight they are and how much they need to lose. The ideal score is a 3 out of 5 and would indicate the rabbit was at its optimum weight.



DOWNLOAD YOUR  
UKPETFOOD  
RABBIT-O-METRE AT  
UKPETFOOD.ORG/

### RABBIT SIZE-O-METER

☒ Your pet is a healthy weight  
☐ Seek advice about your pet's weight  
☐ Seek advice as your pet could be at risk

**PLEASE NOTE**  
Getting hands on is the key to this simple system. Whilst the pictures in the Rabbit Size-O-Meter will help, judging whether your pet is the right weight purely by sight alone has its difficulties. A long coat can disguise ribs, hip bones and the spine, while a short coat can make a rabbit's appearance more irregular and highlight these areas you will need to gently feel your pet which can be a pleasurable bonding experience for both of you!

www.ukpetfood.org

Size-O-Meter Score:		Characteristics:
<b>1 VERY THIN</b> More than 20% below ideal body weight		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hip bones, ribs and spine are very sharp to the touch</li> <li>Loss of muscle and no fat cover</li> <li>The rump area curves in</li> </ul>
<b>2 THIN</b> Between 10-20% below ideal body weight		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hip bones, ribs and spine are easily felt</li> <li>Loss of muscle and very little fat cover</li> <li>Rump area is flat</li> </ul>
<b>3 IDEAL</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hip bones, ribs and spine easily felt but are rounded, not sharp - Ribs feel like a pocket full of pens!</li> <li>No abdominal bulge</li> <li>Rump area is flat</li> </ul>
<b>4 OVERWEIGHT</b> 10-15% above ideal body weight		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pressure is needed to feel the ribs, spine and hip bones</li> <li>Some fat layers</li> <li>The rump is rounded</li> </ul>
<b>5 OBESE</b> More than 15% above ideal body weight		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very hard to feel the spine and hip bones - Ribs can't be felt</li> <li>Tummy sags with obvious fat padding</li> <li>Rump bulges out</li> </ul>

Produced with assistance and advice from Brigitte Lord MRCVS and Anna Meredith MRCVS  
Illustrated with photographs and advice from Brigitte Lord MRCVS and Anna Meredith MRCVS

# RABBIT NUTRITION

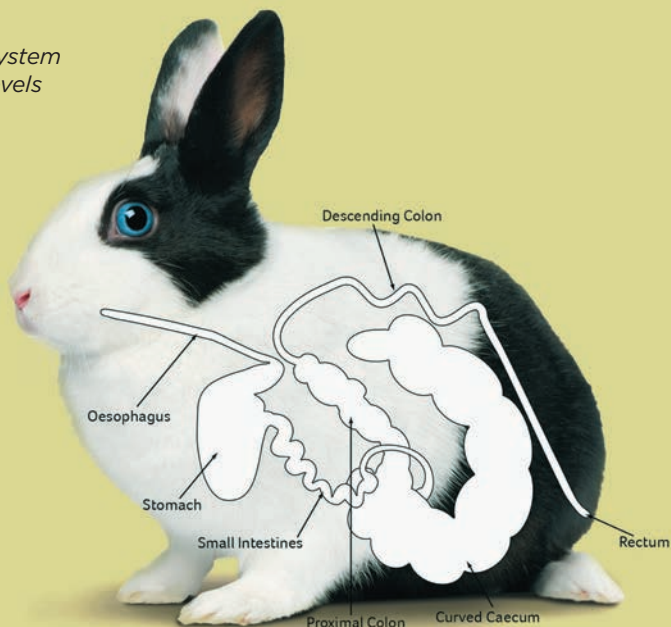
Rabbits need high levels of fibre in their diet. Without high fibre foods their digestive systems will not work correctly; their gut should be in constant motion with the right balance of fibre, without this they are susceptible to gut stasis.

Rabbits' teeth are designed to continually grow as they get worn down by the fibrous grasses they feed on in the wild. If rabbits do not get enough abrasive foods their teeth will become overgrown making it painful for them to eat at all. That's why it's so important that as an owner you ensure that your rabbits' diets are made up of roughly **85-90% high quality feeding hay or grass**.

Rabbits also have a tendency to selectively feed, if you feed a muesli style diet they are likely to eat the high starch and sugary elements of food leaving the higher fibre pieces. Selective feeding has been shown to increase the risk of a variety of illnesses. Therefore, it is important that you feed a **nutritionally balanced high-fibre nugget or pellet** in order to avoid this.

It's also extremely important that you stick to feeding your rabbits according to feeding guides on pack. Overfeeding nuggets or treats can reduce hay intake and lead to obesity.

*Your rabbits have a complex digestive system that requires high-levels of fibre to keep it in constant motion.*



# THE EXCEL FEEDING PLAN



## 1. EXCEL FEEDING HAY & GRASS

High-quality, dust extracted feeding hay should make up 85-90% of your rabbits' diet. You should make sure it is freely available and replaced with fresh hay every day.



## 2. EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS

Should be fed as a supplement to feeding hay or grass to ensure your rabbits get all the minerals they need. You should look for nugget products appropriate to your rabbits' life stage.



## 3. EXCEL NATURE SNACKS

Natural snacks can be fed in small amounts either by hand to help bonding, left in housing to keep your rabbits occupied or sprinkled through feeding hay to encourage foraging.



## 4. FRESH GREENS

Can be fed as a treat to add variety and provide additional nutrition. Have a look at our guide to find out what can be fed to your bunnies.

### Everyday

Grasses (not lawn clippings), dandelion leaves, plantain, herb robert, rose bush leaves, nasturtium, wild geranium, strawberry and raspberry leaves, hazel tree leaves & branches, willow tree leaves & branches, apple tree leaves and branches, Hawthorn, brambles, goosegrass, blackthorn, nettle (dried), cauliflower leaves, celery leaves, green pepper, kale, mint, romaine lettuce, spring greens.

### Occasionally (In Small Amounts)

Apple (pipless), banana, savoy cabbage, turnip, carrot tops, swede, spinach, parsley, basil, dill, oregano, coriander.



## 5. FRESH WATER

Fresh water should always be available. Change it daily and ensure it hasn't frozen in the winter months.



# THE EXCEL RANGE

## EXCEL LONG STEM FEEDING HAY

A long stem, sweet smelling feeding Timothy hay that's irresistible and high in beneficial fibre (63%). The time of cutting and the drying process helps to maintain the nutritional goodness. Lush, green and long, it encourages chewing, which is essential for dental health and provides emotional enrichment.



## EXCEL FEEDING HAY WITH DANDELION & MARIGOLD

A sweet smelling hay made from fresh Timothy Hay with Dandelion and Marigold, high in beneficial fibre (63%). Timothy Hay is an excellent source of good quality, long fibre.



## EXCEL FEEDING HAY DRIED FRESH GRASS

A barn dried Timothy grass harvested straight from the field that's naturally high in beneficial fibre (55%).



## EXCEL HAY BOX

Our hay boxes are suitable for rabbits, guinea pigs & chinchillas is made from 100% natural ingredients and comes in a fully recyclable box.

Dust has been extracted to help protect your pet's respiratory health, and our hay is high in Beneficial fibre, which aids with digestion. Available in Meadow Hay or Timothy Hay.



## BEDDING

### EXCEL NAP AND NEST PAPER BEDDING

The Excel Nap & Nest is great for use as bedding and litter for your small animals. Our bedding is made from unused offcuts from the teabag production industry, which makes it super absorbent and soft on little paws.

Designed for use as litter and bedding, it's suitable for rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, and small animals. Now in a handy resealable bag.



# THE EXCEL RANGE

## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR JUNIOR & DWARF RABBITS

Young and dwarf rabbits have higher metabolic rates than adults, so Excel Junior & Dwarf accounts for this through its higher protein level.



## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR ADULT RABBITS

With four varieties to choose from: Mint, Oregano, Light and Nature's Blend rabbits can enjoy variety in their diet.



## EXCEL INDOOR ADULT RABBIT NUGGETS

With vitamin D, dandelion and nettle, Indoor Rabbit Nuggets have been specially formulated for the needs of indoor rabbits. Formulated with L-Carnitine to help maintain healthy weight.



## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR MATURE RABBITS

Contains special ingredients to deal with some of the problems that age brings, such as joint stiffness and a lack of energy. Also helps to keep weight under control.



# THE EXCEL RANGE

## HIGH FIBRE BAKED TREATS

Baked with love our Excel Herby Hearts and Fruity Feasts are irresistible to rabbits and are naturally healthy too.



## EXCEL FORAGE EXCEL MEADOW MUNCHIES

Our meadow munchies are compressed hay bars made from a tasty blend of dried grasses, dandelion and camomile.



## EXCEL FORAGE AND FEAST HAY BAR

Our hay bars are high in fibre and perfect for hand feeding. These tasty hay bars are made with natural ingredients and topped with delicious flowers - Rose, Cornflower and Marigold.



## EXCEL FORAGE

Lovingly made, our delicious forage mixes are a healthy treat and are ideal for sprinkling on hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour. Luscious Leaves are made with a tempting mix of dandelion leaves, nettle leaves, red clover and ribwort and our Wildflower Forage are made with a tempting mix of rose, hibiscus, marigold & cornflower.



## EXCEL FORAGE AND FEAST MINI BALES

Our Excel Forage & Feast Mini Bales are perfect for your rabbits, guinea pigs, or chinchillas. Available in three tasty options, Cornflower, Rosehip & Marigold, they are made with natural ingredients and is great for encouraging natural foraging.



## EXCEL BOTANICAL BLENDS HEDGEROW HERBS

Burgess Excel Botanical Blends Hedgerow Herbs, is a complementary feed for rabbits, guinea pigs and chinchillas. Sprinkle a small handful of Botanical Blends, through Burgess Excel Feeding Hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour. Feed in moderation.



# HOUSING

## HOW BIG SHOULD MY RABBITS' HOUSING BE?

Your rabbits' housing should be permanently attached to a larger space within which they can exercise freely in both daytime and night-time, whether this is a safe bunny-proofed room indoors or a large run outdoors.

The housing itself should be as big as possible but at least 2 feet high, 2 feet wide and 6 feet long.

The run area should be at least 3 feet high, 6 feet wide and 10 feet long so that your bunnies can run around as they would do in the wild. However, it is good to give your rabbits as much space as possible so that they can exercise as they would in the wild.

## WHAT GOES INTO MY RABBITS' HOUSING?

Your rabbits' housing should have safe hiding places so that they can hide and feel safe from danger. Make sure you have a secure shelter with plenty of soft, safe bedding, either dust-free hay or special bedding designed specifically for rabbits.

Your rabbits will also need access to an area where they can go to the toilet; this should be separate to the sleeping areas and you can use newspaper and/or a paper based non-expanding litter. There should also be at least one hiding place per rabbit with two entrances/exits.

Your rabbits should have a constant fresh supply of good-quality feeding hay, placed in hay racks and areas that are separate to the bedding area. There should also be fresh, clean water constantly available.



IT'S IMPORTANT TO PROVIDE ENRICHMENT ITEMS FOR YOUR RABBITS. TUNNELS, PLATFORMS AND HIDING PLACES ALL WORK WELL.

## WHERE SHOULD I HOUSE MY RABBITS?

### Outdoors

When kept outside, your rabbits' housing should, be sheltered from the elements, provide enough warm bedding and be well ventilated, dry and free of draughts. Your rabbits should have secure shelter where they can rest and feel safe, the housing should be secure from predators and escape proof.

### Indoors

Rabbits can be kept indoors, but it is important that you gradually get your rabbits used to common household sights and sounds. It's also important that they are protected from other animals who are their natural predators.

All areas that the rabbits move around in should be fully rabbit-proofed to ensure that they are safe and protected from hazards. For example, all electric cables should be covered and any house plants should either be safe for rabbits or kept out of the way.

You should also make sure the flooring is non-slip as slippery floors can cause rabbits stress.

You should have a litter tray for each of your rabbits which is separate from their bedding area: you can speak to your vet for advice on litter training. It's also important that you provide plenty of enrichment. Ideally, give your rabbits access to a secure area outside so that they can dig and graze on grass. If this isn't possible the next best thing is to provide 'dig-boxes' filled with earth or child-safe sand and pots with growing grass in.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CLEAN MY RABBITS' HOUSING?

You should give your rabbits' housing a quick clean daily, throwing out wet/dirty bedding, uneaten food and cleaning and refilling food and drink containers.

Each week you should give the housing a thorough clean, removing and replacing all bedding.

Every month you should give your rabbits' housing a 'deep clean' where you take everything out, scrub the housing with a animal-safe cleaner then replace bedding with fresh hay.



# EXERCISING YOUR RABBIT

As well as having appropriate housing, there are activities you can do with your rabbits to keep them fit, happy and healthy!

Rabbits are very inquisitive and enjoy exploring. They will play happily with **plastic tubes and cardboard boxes** which also make good hiding places; being prey animals by nature rabbits can scare easily. It's also a good idea to have a **range of suitable toys and hiding spots**, you can move these around your rabbits environment each week to keep them interested.

Make an outdoor exercise run. **Rabbits like to hop around, play, rummage in the grass and graze.** The bigger you can make the run, the better, but make sure you bury the wire at least 40cm into the ground, so your rabbits can't burrow out and escape.

Give your rabbits the chance to dig. **Rabbits love digging.** A seed tray filled with potting compost lets them do what comes naturally, without burrowing holes all over the garden!

## GET CRAFTY!

You can buy or make things for your rabbits to play with too! A willow ball stuffed with their favourite feeding hay will give your rabbits enrichment as well as exercise.

Also you can make something as simple as hay kebabs – stuff a toilet tube with hay and sticks poked through to stop the hay falling out easily is great for keeping rabbits occupied.



# BEHAVIOUR & COMPANIONSHIP

## HOW MANY RABBITS SHOULD I KEEP?

Rabbits are extremely sociable animals and can get depressed without social interaction with other bunnies. You should keep rabbits in at least pairs where possible, adopting siblings is great as they already know each other so are less likely to fight. If you are introducing rabbits to each other for the first time you should introduce them slowly and follow your vet's advice. All rabbits kept together should be neutered, even siblings, to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

If one of your rabbits has passed away and you want to adopt another to keep the remaining rabbit company then a good rabbit rescue centre will often help with the bonding process.

## HOW MUCH SHOULD I INTERACT WITH MY RABBITS?

Rabbits are very friendly and enjoy interaction with humans as well as their rabbit friend(s). Therefore, it's important that you make lots of time daily to interact with your rabbits.

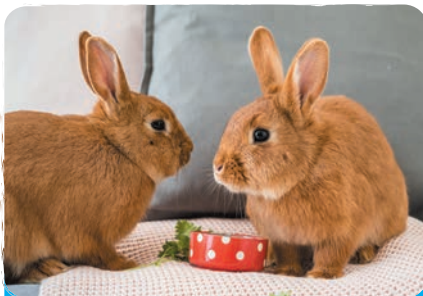
## CAN RABBITS BE AGGRESSIVE?

Rabbits are not aggressive by nature but they can bite, scratch or kick when they feel nervous. This is most likely to happen when you're handling them, therefore it's important that you ensure your rabbits are used to being handled from a young age.

When rabbits who do not know each other are introduced they can be aggressive so it's important that if you do this you do it gradually following your vet's advice.

## CAN I KEEP RABBITS WITH OTHER ANIMALS?

It is unwise to keep rabbits with larger animals as rabbits are prey species and are likely to see larger animals as a threat, becoming stressed. Rabbits should also not be kept with smaller animals, including guinea pigs, as they have very strong hind legs and can accidentally injure their guinea pig companion. Rabbits also carry a bacteria which doesn't cause symptoms for them but can cause respiratory issues for guinea pigs.



## HOW SHOULD I HANDLE MY RABBITS?

It is best to avoid picking rabbits up as they tend to much prefer being petted on the floor where they feel safer. When you do need to pick one of your rabbits up you should place one hand under the rabbit's chest, the other hand under the hind legs and lift your rabbit while holding them against your body to keep them secure.



# DISEASE & PROTECTION



## RVHD1

### ABOUT THE VIRUS

Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 1 (RVHD1) is an extremely infectious virus that is usually fatal. The RVHD1 virus kills by causing internal bleeding.

### SYMPTOMS

RVHD1 often has no symptoms, meaning that it is very hard to spot. There is sometimes bleeding from body openings such as the nose, eyes and/or anus, but these are very easy to miss without daily checks.

### MODE OF TRANSMISSION

It is a **myth** that RVHD1 can only be caught through contact with an infected rabbit. In actual fact the virus can be carried by:

- Birds and insects and their droppings
- The wind
- Soles of shoes, car tyres or other pets' feet
- An infected rabbit or their droppings
- Owners' hands or clothes

The virus can survive months in the environment, especially in cold temperatures.

### PREVENTION

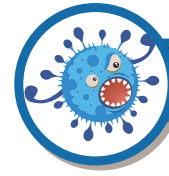
Your vet can vaccinate your rabbits against RVHD1 (this is often done with the Nobivac+ combined vaccination for myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2). Your vet will then advise what booster vaccinations your rabbit will need (usually every 12 months).

### TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment available for RVHD1, though your vet can offer supportive care.

### PROGNOSIS

RVHD1 is usually fatal within a couple of days to weeks. There are very limited examples of rabbits surviving the disease.



## RVHD2

### ABOUT THE VIRUS

Rabbit Viral Haemorrhagic Disease 2 (RVHD2) is a new strain of the virus RVHD1. Cases of the disease were first reported in the UK in 2015. As with RVHD1 the virus causes internal bleeding.

### SYMPTOMS

RVHD2 often has no symptoms, meaning that it is very hard to spot early on.

Where symptoms do occur these signs are easily confused with other health conditions: fever, lethargy, neurological signs (coma) and blood clotting problems.

### MODE OF TRANSMISSION

It is a **myth** that RVHD2 can only be caught through contact with an infected rabbit. In actual fact the virus can be carried by:

- Birds and insects and their droppings
- The wind
- Soles of shoes, car tyres or other pets' feet
- An infected rabbit or their droppings
- Owners' hands or clothes

This is just a small section of the list of ways RVHD2 can be carried. Practically, there is no way to stop the virus getting into your rabbits' indoor or outdoor environment. Therefore, the only way to protect your rabbits is through vaccination.

### PREVENTION

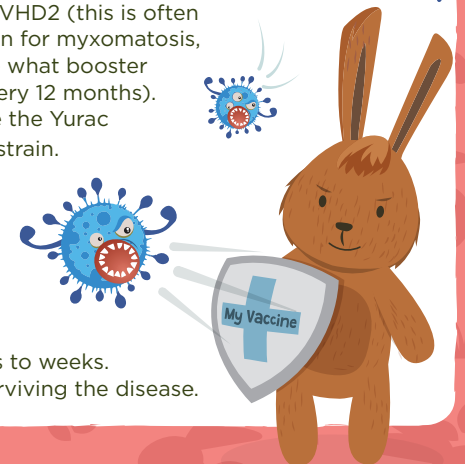
Your vet can vaccinate your rabbits against RVHD2 (this is often done with the Nobivac+ combined vaccination for myxomatosis, RVHD1 and RVHD2). Your vet will then advise what booster vaccinations your rabbit will need (usually every 12 months). Your vet may also advise your rabbits to have the Yurac vaccine, which is needed for RVHD2 virulent strain.

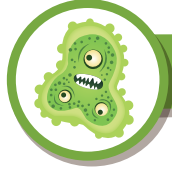
### TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment available for RVHD2, though your vet can offer supportive care.

### PROGNOSIS

RVHD2 is usually fatal within a couple of days to weeks. There are very limited examples of rabbits surviving the disease.





## MYXOMATOSIS

### ABOUT THE DISEASE

Myxomatosis has been present in the UK since it was introduced from South America in the 1950s. It killed a very high percentage of the wild rabbits, and still kills many wild and pet rabbits every year.

### SYMPTOMS

The full-blown form of myxomatosis affects the eyelids, the skin of the ears, lips and genitals causing swellings.

There is a purely skin form of myxomatosis, which isn't usually fatal, it causes small thickened lumps of skin to form on the eyelids, nose, head and sometimes the shoulders. These typically fall away after 2-3 weeks.

### MODE OF TRANSMISSION

Myxomatosis is mainly spread by direct contact by fleas. Rabbits fleas are the most common carriers but flying and biting insects can spread it.

Rabbits can also catch the disease through direct contact with other rabbits.

### PREVENTION

Your vet can vaccinate your rabbits against myxomatosis (this is often done with the Nobivac combined vaccination for myxomatosis and RVHD1). Your vet will then advise what booster vaccinations your rabbit will need (usually every 6-12 months). Vaccination can take place from five weeks of age and take three weeks to become effective.

Vaccination is very effective; however, vaccinated rabbits can still get a milder form of the disease. The prognosis for vaccinated rabbits is very good with the majority fully recovering.

### TREATMENT

There is no specific treatment available for myxomatosis, though your vet can offer supportive care.

### PROGNOSIS

The prognosis for an unvaccinated rabbit with full-blown myxomatosis is usually a long and painful death. Therefore, euthanasia is the kindest option.

The prognosis for rabbits with just the skin form or rabbits that are vaccinated is usually good with the majority surviving without needing significant treatment.



## DENTAL DISEASE

### ABOUT THE CONDITION

Rabbits in the wild eat huge amounts of fibrous material, spending 80% of their time foraging and eating a variety of grasses. The movement they need to perform to grind grass down also wears down the teeth. Rabbits teeth therefore continually grow. Without the right amount of coarse, fibrous materials in their diet their teeth can grow overlong: this is a form of dental disease.

### SYMPTOMS

You can check your rabbits' dental health weekly, looking for any of the below symptoms:

- Discharge from the eyes or nose
- Abnormal looking teeth
- Weight loss
- Drool
- Partly-chewed food

If you spot any of these symptoms, then you should take your rabbit to the vet.

### CAUSES

The main cause of dental disease is that your rabbit isn't getting enough foods with 'long length fibre' and abrasive silicates (grass or hay), meaning that their teeth aren't getting worn down.

Muesli style diets have been proven to reduce the amount of hay rabbits eat, increasing the likelihood of dental disease.

Certain rabbit breeds such as dwarf and lop eared are also prone to dental disease because their smaller skull shape often means overcrowded teeth which are likely to grow in the wrong direction.

### PREVENTION

The best way to prevent dental disease is to ensure that your rabbits eat plenty of feeding hay/grass. Feeding hay and fresh grass should make up 85-90% of a rabbit's diet. Overfeeding fresh greens, treats or nuggets is likely to reduce a rabbit's hay/grass consumption, so always follow the feeding guidelines on pack.

**Never feed your rabbits muesli style diets.**

### TREATMENT

Your vet will first look to take steps to relieve pain, restore hydration and deliver nutritional support. Then it is likely that your rabbit will need either tooth trimming or extractions under anaesthesia.

You may need to syringe feed your rabbit for a period of time after dental work, but your veterinary nurse will be able to support you with this.

### PROGNOSIS

If dental disease is treated quickly rabbits usually have a good chance of recovery.

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