

FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

A lot of the health problems seen in rabbits in the UK are caused by feeding too much pelleted rabbit food.

Problems can include digestive, skin, eye issues but most importantly dental disease, and are generally the result of the rabbit not eating enough fibre. Rabbits have evolved to eat a very high fibre diet. In the wild they would eat a large amount of fibrous material, including grass, scrubby vegetation and even the bark from trees. Because of this, they have a digestive system designed system to process large amounts of fibre, and teeth which grow continuously to cope with wear. Wild rabbits are known to spend up to five hours a day chewing.

Problems arise in rabbits fed on concentrated (muesli or pellet) rabbit food because it contains a lot of grain, which is rich in carbohydrate and contains very little fibre. These pelleted and muesli mixes were designed to feed rabbits for meat production. They provide the rabbit with lots of calories, but require very little chewing. A rabbit fed on a bowl of rabbit food can eat all the calories it needs for a day within about ten minutes, rather than the five hours a wild rabbit would spend chewing. This results in less wear on the teeth which will then overgrow, causing problems such as drooling, weight loss, runny eyes, abscesses, fur mites and dirty bottoms.

In pet rabbits, good quality hay and grass should be provided as a source of fibre, but it is not enough just to provide them. **In order to prevent health problems caused by insufficient fibre in the diet, it is essential to restrict the amount of concentrate food the rabbit if given.** Rabbits will eat concentrate in preference to hay, and rabbits fed more than about a dessert spoon of rabbit food a day will not eat enough hay to wear their teeth down increasing the risk of developing dental problems. Restriction is essential.

A healthy daily diet for a rabbit should consist of a large armful of good quality hay and a dessert spoon sized amount of rabbit food. Foods such as breakfast cereals, sweet corn, bread, biscuits and large amounts of fruit should be avoided as they are high in carbohydrates. Any concentrate food that is fed should be of the pelleted rather than the muesli variety, as muesli mixes promote selective feeding which can lead to vitamin deficiencies.



Maids Moreton
Overton
Maids Moreton
Buckingham
MK18 1RE
Tel: 01280 812057

Old Stratford
5 Furtho Court
Towcester Road
Old Stratford
MK19 6AQ
Tel: 01908 567272

FEEDING YOUR RABBIT

When changing a rabbit from a concentrate based diet it is important to do this slowly over a period of at least six weeks. Gradually reduce the concentrate and increase the vegetables and hay, weighing the rabbit weekly to make sure it is not losing too much weight. It is a very good idea to get a vet or nurse to check your rabbit's teeth prior to changing its diet as existing dental problems will need addressing before any changes are made.

HAY

Hay is an essential part of a the daily diet but some types of hay are more attractive to the rabbit than others. Choose one which is green, has long fibres and smells sweet. Timothy hay and Excel Forage are favourites and come with added herbs which rabbits love. Avoid short, brown, dusty hay. Dried or fresh grass are good alternatives, but do not feed lawn mower clippings as they will often have started to ferment. Straw is less suitable as it contains very little in the way of nutrition.

VEGETABLES

Rabbits can eat a wide variety of green vegetables and non-poisonous plants from the garden such as dandelion, roses, fruit tree barks, clover etc. Mixes may include cabbage, kale, broccoli, spinach, brussel sprouts, carrot tops, cauliflower and herbs.

Salad vegetables, carrots and fruits should only be fed in small amounts.

To avoid digestive upsets it is important to add all new foods in slowly!



Maids Moreton
Overton
Maids Moreton
Buckingham
MK18 1RE
Tel: 01280 812057

Old Stratford
5 Furtho Court
Towcester Road
Old Stratford
MK19 6AQ
Tel: 01908 567272