

RABBIT CARE

Rabbits are becoming increasingly popular pets, and we are now able to provide the same standards of care you would expect for your dogs and cats. Rabbits are social animals but they are a "prey" species and therefore have well adapted responses to avoid capture which may make them nervous or even aggressive when handled.

As with any animal it is important to become familiar with normal behaviour so that early signs of disease can be detected. Hygiene and diet are particularly important in the prevention of disease. If you are in any doubt about the health or care of your rabbit please do not hesitate to consult us.

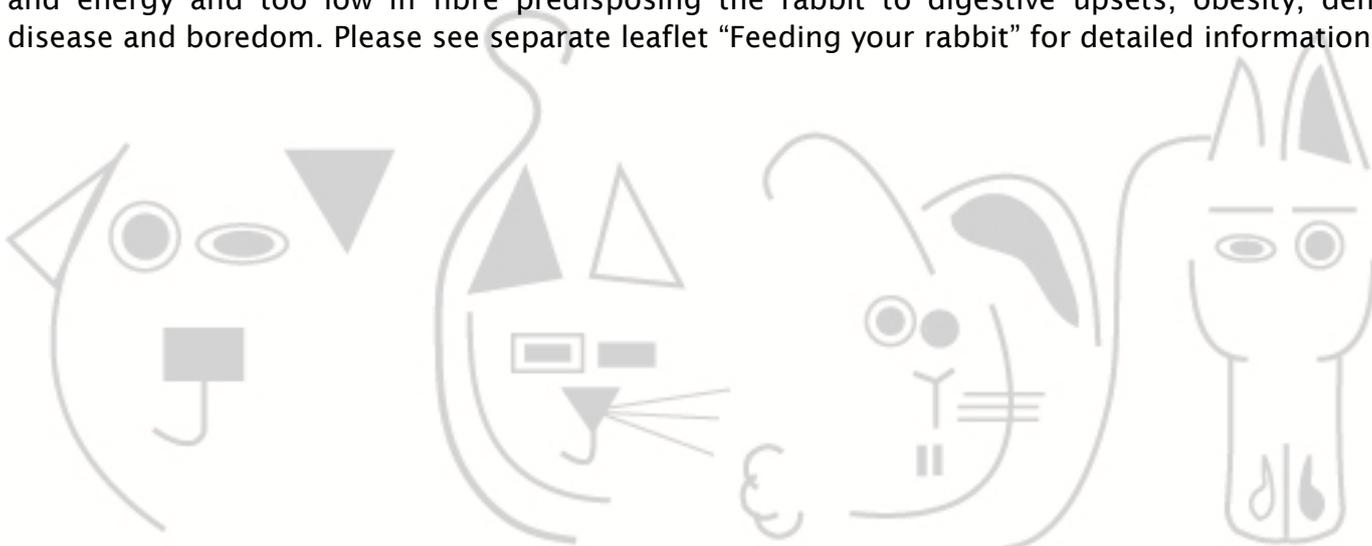
HOUSING

The hutch should be as large as possible but at the very least should allow the rabbit to stretch out fully and sit up on its haunches. Many hutches that are commercially available are too small for all except dwarf breeds. A run should be provided of sufficient size to allow at least 3 hops from one end to the other. The run should preferably allow access to grass (though some care may be needed to prevent burrowing, especially with female rabbits). Runs should provide shelter from the sun as rabbits are prone to heat-stroke, and a "bolt-hole" where the rabbit can go if it feels threatened.

Most rabbits given a large enough area will create a separate toilet area leaving their bed clean. This natural instinct to keep the "burrow" clean can also be used to train rabbits to use a litter tray in the house for "house rabbits". Wood or paper based litter should be used as Fuller's earth based products may be harmful if eaten. Hygiene is important as wet soiled bedding can lead to sore hocks and high ammonia levels can lead to respiratory disease.

FEEDING

Rabbits are herbivores feeding mostly on grass and leaves, they have adapted to spend a large part of the day feeding on a high fibre diet. Many commercial diets are too high in protein, fat and energy and too low in fibre predisposing the rabbit to digestive upsets, obesity, dental disease and boredom. Please see separate leaflet "Feeding your rabbit" for detailed information.



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

RABBIT CARE

VACCINATIONS

We recommend vaccination against the two most serious viral diseases of the rabbit:

Myxomatosis

Spread by fleas and mosquitoes, causing puffy eyelids and a purulent (pus-producing) conjunctivitis followed by oedema (swelling under the skin) around the face and genital region. Cases are commonly seen in unvaccinated domestic rabbits and almost invariably lead to death or euthanasia on humane grounds.

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease

This disease is being reported increasingly in this country in the last few years. Fever and anorexia (not eating) or difficulty in breathing with a bloody nasal discharge may be noticed, but most animals die suddenly without warning.

A combined vaccine is used to immunise against both of these diseases. It is available as a single dose from 5 weeks of age, an annual booster is required.

NEUTERING

The breeding ability of rabbits is legendary, and even if the opportunity is not available the desire to mate will remain, increasing aggressive behaviour. As well as preventing unwanted litters, neutering will often improve relationships between same sex pairs of rabbits. In the female rabbit there is the added benefit of protecting against ovarian and uterine cancer which has been shown to develop in over 80% of unspayed does by the age of 5 years.

Males can be neutered from about 4-6 months of age, once the testes have descended.

Females can be neutered from 5 months of age.

Surgery is performed under general anaesthesia and your rabbit can normally go home that evening, although we recommend that it is kept inside to enable observation and avoid cold and draughts. Rabbits do not have to be starved prior to surgery. Skin sutures are usually soluble and don't need removing although we do recommend a post-operative check appointment.



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

RABBIT CARE

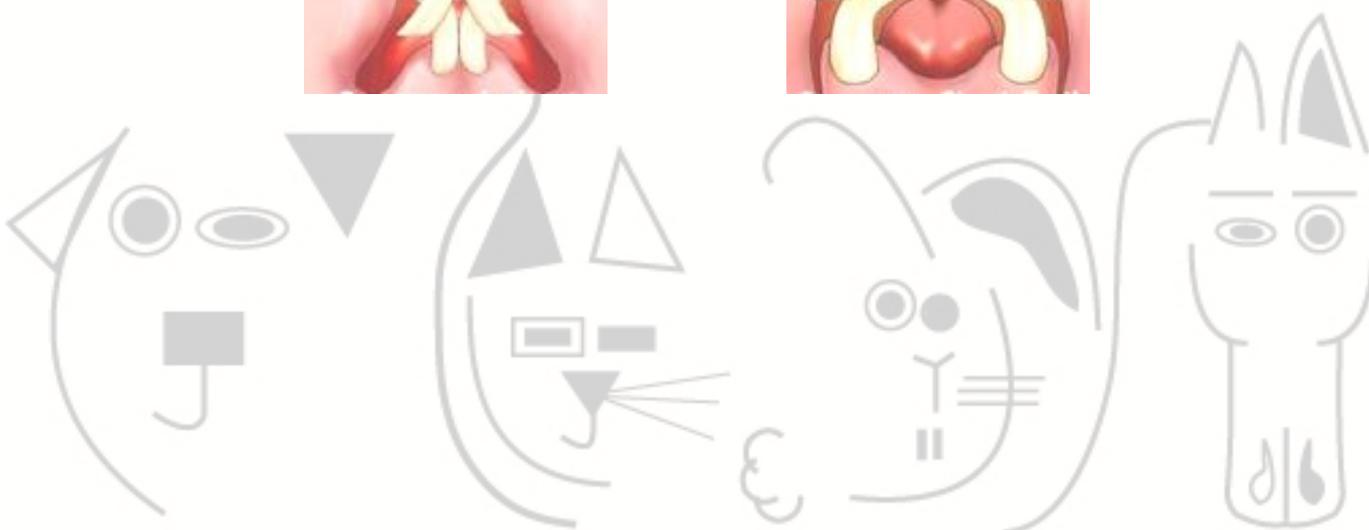
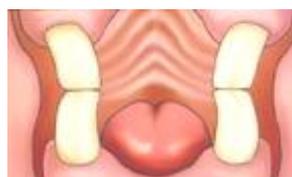
DENTAL CARE

One of the major issues with incorrect diet is tooth overgrowth. Rabbit teeth grow throughout life and need to be worn down by chewing. If this does not occur the incisor (front) teeth may grow out of the mouth preventing normal feeding and grooming. If the molars (cheek teeth) do not meet properly they wear unevenly, causing sharp spikes to form. These can cause painful ulcers at the edges of the tongue or in the cheeks making the animal salivate excessively and eventually stopping feeding or grooming. While overgrown front teeth can usually be cut with the animal firmly held inspection and treatment of the back teeth requires anaesthesia. This is definitely one area where prevention is the best treatment.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Dental Disease

As mentioned above dental disease accounts for a large proportion of the health problems we see in rabbits. This can in turn lead to abscesses in the facial region, and caking of the perineal region with caecotrophs (a special type of faecal pellet that the rabbit re-eats to provide additional nutrients).



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

RABBIT CARE

Obesity

Obesity can also prevent grooming and normal eating of ceacotrophs, leading to further health issues. To avoid obesity or gradually reduce your rabbit's weight, provide a high fibre diet and plenty of exercise.

Urinary problems

Rabbits can suffer cystitis and bladder stones but in many cases discolouration of the urine is normal. Rabbit urine can vary from cloudy white to almost red and still be quite normal, however if you are unsure please consult the vet, bringing a sample if you can.

Uterine problems

Many cases that appear to be blood in the urine may actually be blood from the uterus as adenocarcinoma (a type of cancer) of the uterus is quite common in older un-neutered does.

Pasteurellosis

Infection with the bacterium *Pasteurella multocida* can cause various problems but is most often associated with abscesses and respiratory problems which range from a nasal discharge ("snuffles") to life threatening pneumonia. Nasal discharge can also occur with infection of the tear ducts following from dental disease. Infection of the ear can lead to head tilt and loss of balance. Prompt treatment with antibiotics and good nursing is essential.



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

RABBIT CARE

BIOLOGICAL DATA

Average lifespan 6-12 years
Sexual maturity 16-24 weeks
Gestation period 30-33 days
Weaning age 5-7 weeks
Rectal temperature 38.3 C (range 37-39.4)
Respiratory rate 35-60 / minute
Heart rate 220 / minute

CONTACTS

The Rabbit Welfare Association:
PO Box 346, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE99 2YP

www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk

The British Rabbit Council:
Purefoy House, & Kirkgate, Newark, Nottingham NG24 1AD

www.thebrc.org



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