

RABBITS

WHY GET A RABBIT?

- ◆ Rabbits have lots of personality—they are curious, social, affectionate, interactive, and fun!
- ◆ Rabbits are quiet pets, make good company, can be litter trained, and don't need to be walked; they do, however, need daily play time and attention.
- ◆ When rabbits are excited and happy, they fling themselves in the air. This is called a “binky.”

HANDLING/BONDING:

- ◆ The best way to bond with your rabbit is by sitting on the ground and allowing your bunny to come to you; then, you can give your bunny treats when it allows you to pet it.
- ◆ Rabbits have powerful hind legs and can kick with a large amount of force; therefore, they must be properly handled, always supporting their entire body and hind end; your veterinarian can teach you the best way to pick them up.

DIET:

- ◆ What should my rabbit eat?
 - 70% Timothy or other hays
 - High fiber helps promote a healthy digestive tract
 - Hay helps keep teeth ground down to prevent overgrowth
 - Alfalfa hay should not be fed to adult rabbits, as it is too high in protein and calcium, and may be linked to kidney disease and bladder stones
 - 15% Fresh vegetables (washed thoroughly)
 - *Dark* lettuce mixes, turnip greens, spring greens, carrots, bell peppers, cilantro, fennel
 - Too much kale, spinach, parsley, and mustard greens can contribute to urinary disease (feed only in small amounts)
 - 10% Rabbit pellets
 - Oxbow timothy-hay based pellets are veterinarian-recommended
 - Alfalfa-based pellets are for young, growing rabbits <1yr or breeding rabbits (check ingredient list on food bag)
 - <5% Fruits (apples, bananas, strawberries)
 - Rabbits need to be fed daily and should have unlimited access to fresh hay at all times.

HOUSING:

- ◆ How should my rabbit be housed?
 - Rabbits are very prone to heat stress, so they should be housed indoors and their environment needs to stay lower than 80°F.
 - They should get at least 1 hour per day outside their cage to run around in a rabbit-safe area.
 - Rabbits should always have a place to hide in their cage (timothy bungalow, wooden hut, etc).
 - Rabbit-friendly flooring includes newspaper, towels, and/or natural Carefresh bedding. Do not use wood shavings, as the aromatic oils can cause respiratory irritation and organ toxicity (kiln-dried aspen is the exception). Rabbits should not be housed in a wire-bottomed cage, as this can cause foot infections.
 - The cage should contain a shallow litter box. Unscented Yesterday's News recycled newspaper cat litter or Oxbow EcoStraw are good options. Do not use clumping cat litter.
 - The litter box should be cleaned out daily, and the cage at least 1-2 times weekly to allow for proper sanitation and prevent respiratory issues due to too much ammonia and bacteria.
 - Rabbits should have fresh water available at all times; water bowls work best to promote water intake, but having both a bowl and water bottle is best.

COMMON DISEASES:

- ◆ What are common diseases of rabbits?
 - Gastrointestinal (GI) stasis, dental disease, bladder stones, ear infections, E. cuniculi, respiratory disease, pododermatitis, uterine cancer
- ◆ What is GI stasis?
 - Rabbits are hind-gut fermenters, which means *they must constantly eat and poop to survive*.
 - When a rabbit stops eating, even for a half of a day, it is an emergency and your rabbit should be taken to a veterinarian right away.
 - When a rabbit's GI tract slows down, bad bacteria overgrow, which can cause spread of bacteria and toxins into the bloodstream; this can be rapidly fatal.
 - GI stasis is always secondary to a primary cause (stress, dental disease, respiratory disease, etc); therefore, it is important to try to identify the main issue, or GI stasis will continue.
 - Supportive care treatment for GI stasis may include Oxbow Critical Care Herbivore (supplemental nutrition), fluid administration, pain medications, and/or antibiotics.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS:

- ◆ Common signs of illness in rabbits include: not eating, lethargy, hunched posture, teeth grinding, nasal or ocular discharge, unwillingness to move or take a treat, lack of fecal production, drooling, watery diarrhea (unformed fecal balls), head tilt, etc.

VETERINARY CARE:

- ◆ Spaying a female rabbit is medically indicated when young to prevent uterine cancer. Depending on the breed, 50-80% of intact female rabbits over 4 years of age develop uterine adenocarcinoma.
- ◆ Neutering a male rabbit can help with behavioral issues, such as spraying or being territorial.
- ◆ Certain antibiotics can be lethal in rabbits. Therefore, taking your rabbit to an exotics veterinarian is very important. Never use fipronil (Frontline), a dog and cat flea/tick preventative on rabbits.
- ◆ How often should I take my rabbit to a veterinarian?
 - It is strongly recommended that you bring your rabbit in for a checkup every year; this is because as a prey species, rabbits are very good at hiding signs of disease until they are extremely sick.
 - At your rabbit's annual exam, the vet will record his/her weight, examine the teeth, eyes, and ears, listen to the heart and lungs, feel his/her belly, etc. This will help identify any potential problems, and hopefully catch them when they are still treatable.

IMPORTANT FACTS:

- ◆ The average life span of a rabbit is 5-8 years old, but small breeds can reach 10-12 years old.
- ◆ Rabbit teeth grow continuously throughout their life. Providing your rabbit with unlimited hay and applewood sticks to chew is critical in order to help prevent dental disease.
- ◆ Rabbits rarely bite, but do love to chew. Ensure their exercise area is rabbit-safe, without access to electrical cords.
- ◆ If considering getting more than one rabbit, the rabbits must first go on "bunny dates" to see who they are compatible with and subsequently bond to.
- ◆ Do rabbits get along with other pets?
 - Many rabbits are curious and typically like other pets...they sometimes even bond with them! However, some pets can be scary or dangerous to rabbits such as loud dogs or cats; therefore, any pets should be introduced very slowly through a barrier, only when being directly monitored.