



Care Guide for your Pet Rabbit



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Getting Started

How to choose your Pet Rabbit?

Since rabbits live for approximately 6-8 years, you must be certain before you acquire your rabbit that you are willing to care for this pet throughout its entire life.

Should you be adopting your new rabbit for your child or children, caring for your pet should be a shared family responsibility; adult supervision for the care and handling is required.

You should not acquire a rabbit that is younger than 8 weeks for at this age it may not be completely weaned. Consider acquiring a re-homed rabbit as these can also make wonderful pets.

Before you choose your pet rabbit, examine it closely with the animal care specialist where you are adopting the rabbit from (pet store, adoption shelter, breeder or other). A veterinarian should be consulted for a new rabbit exam as soon as possible to confirm it is truly in good health, and to establish a health monitoring program, as well as diet and exercise recommendations based on the life stage and lifestyle of your pet rabbit.

A healthy rabbit should have:

- Clear, bright eyes
- Alert and active
- Normal posture, well coordinated
- Clean nose, clear of any discharge
- Normal, even breathing
- Clean inner ears
- Normal ear posture for the species
- No signs of diarrhea on fur, on tail or around anus
- Clean, healthy looking fur with no bare patches
- Normal teeth; the top incisors slightly overlapping the bottom ones
- Healthy weight
- No lumps or scabs on body
- Dry round fecal pellets
- Nails should be well groomed and healthy, they should not be brittle or frayed



Healthy teeth



Clean inner ear



Unhealthy eye with wet fur

Signs of poor health:

- Thin body condition
- Discharge from eyes or nose
- Runny eyes or nose
- Inactive or appears weak
- Rapid or noisy breathing
- Fur in poor condition; bare spots



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Prior to purchasing your rabbit, you should acquire the following:

- A large cage to provide spacious living quarters for a young or a mature rabbit
- Accessories for the rabbit proof room or outdoor run
- Litter box
- Appropriate bedding such as Living World Green Biodegradable Bedding
- Appropriate litter for the litter box such as Living World Biodegradable Litter
- Food dishes: more than one will be needed for offering enrichment foods (preferably ceramic)
- Quality food such as Living World Green Grain-Free Diet
- Good quality grass hay such as Living World Green Timothy Hay or Living World Green Alfalfa Hay for young rabbits
- Water bottle (preferably glass)
- Harness
- Safe, wood toys or sea grass accessories for chewing
- Scale and weighing bin (for regular weight monitoring)
- Soft brush &/or comb for grooming (especially long haired)
- Nail trimmer
- Foraging toys
- Pet carrier for transport



Housing

In the wild, rabbits live in groups, but housing two rabbits in one cage is not recommended. Mature rabbits, particularly males can be aggressive with each other, and if so should not be kept in the same cage.

If you decide to buy two rabbits, the best option is to have them neutered. Spay and neutering can also decrease undesirable behaviors related to hormones and reproductive diseases.

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Your rabbit's cage should:

- Have a solid floor.
- Be large enough to accommodate appropriate cage accessories such as litter box, hideout, hay wheel or hay rack, food dish and water bottle.
- Allow separate areas for eating, sleeping, exercising or going to the litter box.
- Be secure and escape-proof.
- Not be located in areas that are in direct sunlight and/or are too hot. Rabbits are intolerant to high temperatures, and extreme heat can cause sunstroke and even lead to death.
- Be designed for safety and comfort and have convenient access for:
 - 1) interacting with your rabbit
 - 2) easy maintenance with minimal litter spills
 - 3) safely removing and replacing your rabbit



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Proper bedding

Bedding provides a secure substrate that encourages burrowing, and is comfortable for sleeping and nesting.

- The ideal bedding is absorbent, dust-free and provides optimal hygienic condition.
- Do not use bedding that contains scented oils or chemicals which can be harmful to the respiratory system of your pet rabbit.
- Using food such as hay as bedding is unhygienic, as the animal may sit in it, soil it and eat it.
- Changing bedding regularly to eliminate odors, fungus and bacteria, reduces aggression and maintains a healthy environment. This will also help you monitor the daily urine and feces that can highlight gastro intestinal or urinary illnesses.



Handling your pet gently

Rabbits, like all other animals, should be handled in a safe, ethical, respectful and compassionate manner. Small children, in particular are not skilled enough to hold a rabbit in a comfortable and secure manner.

Rabbits have very powerful hind legs (and sharp claws) and can easily injure you or themselves if they begin to kick. Back injuries can also result if inappropriately handled. It is therefore very important that you use the correct technique to pick up your rabbit.

Play with your rabbit while you are sitting on the floor in order to ensure that you will not drop him. This will also be more securing for him as rabbits do not like to be held off the ground, unless they have developed a confidence in the handler.

Picking up your rabbit

- Never pick up a rabbit by the ears. This is painful and can also damage the ears.
- Move slowly to help keep him calm.
- Let your rabbit sniff your hands before you attempt to pick him up.
- Place one hand under its chest usually with one or two fingers in front of the forelegs, and the remaining fingers behind and the second hand supporting the rump. In one movement, lift his body toward your own, and bring him against your chest sideways so he feels secure.

NOTE: For rabbits that tend to kick or squirm, hold his hind legs gently yet firmly with your fingers as you support his rump with your palm. Holding your pet close to your chest gives you a more secure hold, and gives him a feeling of comfort and security.

Particular care is needed with larger rabbits, which are more safely picked up by facing the animal away from you. Cup his upper body with one hand and his hind end with the other.



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Litter training

Most rabbits always urinate and defecate in the same corner of their enclosure, so they are usually very adaptable to litter box training. The sides of the litter box should be low enough to enable your rabbit to have easy access, but high enough to contain the litter.

The box should be placed in the corner in which your rabbit is using as a toilet area. For initial training, add some droppings and a little bedding that is soiled with urine to the box; this will encourage your rabbit to begin using the litter box.



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Advantages to litter box training:

- Easier to keep rabbits clean.
- Less expensive to care for as they do not require a layer of bedding in their enclosure (only litter in their litter box).
- Easier monitoring of feces and urine to help detect both urinary tract and gastro intestinal concerns.



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Cleaning and maintenance

Maintaining a clean environment for your rabbit is essential for its health and well-being.

Daily cleaning tasks

- Remove bedding from the cage and replace if needed for maximum comfort.
- Clean litter box* and add fresh litter. For initial training, simply spot clean.
- Wash food bowl in warm, soapy water, then rinse and dry thoroughly before refilling it with food (especially ones that are used to offer fruits and vegetables as bacteria can grow rapidly on these foods).
- Empty, rinse and refill the water bottle,* checking it for leaks and blockages even if there is water remaining.

* For both litter box and water bottle, having a 2nd item on hand facilitates easy maintenance.

Weekly cleaning tasks

- Remove accessories and all bedding.
- Rinse the cage well and let it dry out thoroughly before laying new bedding.
- Wash water bottle with hot, soapy water then rinse and dry before refilling it with water.



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Feeding a balanced diet

A balanced diet is essential for the health of your rabbit and should include the following:

- A high-quality extrusion diet
- Unlimited amounts of grasses and hays (alfalfa should only be offered in limited quantities for adults)
- Healthy enrichment foods
- Occasional treats



Rabbits are coprophagic, meaning they eat their own feces. There is a good reason for this. Bacteria in the gut help digest food, resulting in valuable nutrients being expelled in the feces. Re-consuming them adds to the nutrition an animal gets from food. So, if you see your pet rabbit doing this, don't stop him, because it is perfectly normal.

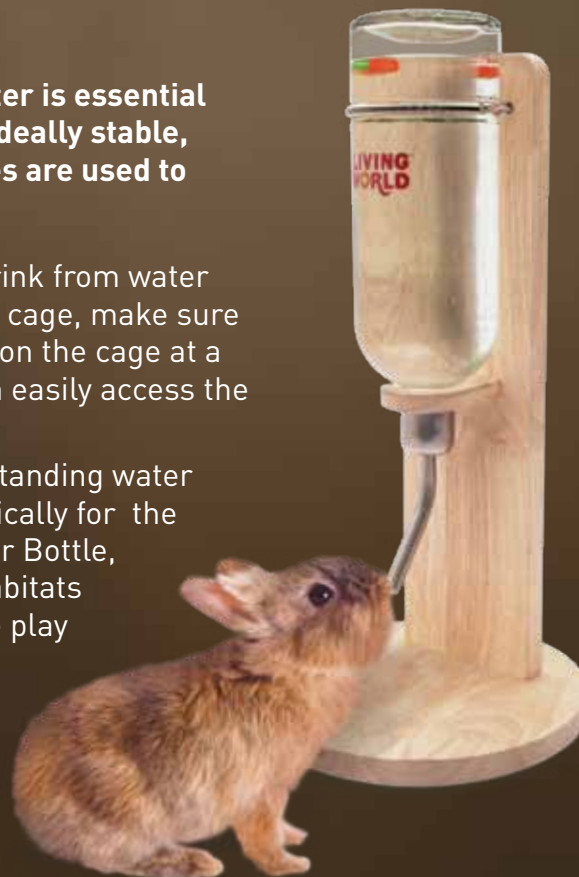
It is important to introduce a new diet gradually to avoid problems in your pet's digestive system. You should establish a regular feeding schedule. Feeding twice daily will help ensure that your rabbit has a constant supply of hay and fresh water. Please consult your small animal veterinarian to discuss a healthy balanced diet appropriate for your rabbit.

Fresh Water

A constant supply of fresh water is essential for the health of your rabbit. Ideally stable, ceramic dishes or glass bottles are used to provide fresh water.

Rabbits are easily trained to drink from water bottles. If being used on a wire cage, make sure that you hang the water bottle on the cage at a height at which your rabbit can easily access the spout.

The Living World Green Free-standing water bottle stand is designed specifically for the Living World Green Glass Water Bottle, and can be used in non wire habitats such as the Eco Habitat or free play areas such a run or corral.



Water bottles are preferable to water bowls as they:

- Are more hygienic (the water stays cleaner and more palatable).
- Allow you to monitor the consumption of water.
- Help ensure your rabbit has a constant supply of water (unlike bowls that may tip).

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Extrusion diet

An excellent way to counter selective eating is to feed extruded food. These diets provide all essential nutrients for optimal health. Quantities given will depend on the lifestyle, life stage and the weight of your rabbit:

- Feed free choice to growing, gestating (pregnant) and lactating (nursing) rabbits.
- Feed limited quantities to adults (depending on body weight).

There are two Living World Green extruded formulas that are suitable for your pet rabbit, depending on their life stage: Juvenile and Adult.

Each formula Ensures the ultimate, well balanced meal:

- Grain-Free and low in starch
- Contains a rich blend of freshly harvested hays from Canada; Alfalfa free
- Favors optimal gut motility and digestibility
- Contains low calcium levels, safe for urinary tract and kidney health



Benefits of extruded food

- Prevents selective eating, ensuring that your rabbit consumes a balanced diet and receives all the necessary nutrients for optimal health.
- Minimizes waste.



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ADDED**


SUGAR
GLUTEN
CORN
GRAINS
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Hay

Hay should always be made available to your pet rabbit at all times. It should be dust free and mold free. Living World Green offers a variety of hays that provide a nutritious source of long-strand fibre. By alternating hay varieties, you help ensure your rabbit does not become a selective eater that refuses hay which has changed colour or texture. Offering a combination of hays that vary in taste, scent and texture will enliven your rabbit's senses and enrich its diet.

Note: Alfalfa hay, which is rich in protein and calcium, should be offered to adult rabbits in limited quantities only. Given in excess, animals will ingest excesses of nutrients, and they may also become obese, both of which may lead to health problems. It can be offered in larger quantities to growing animals (until the juvenile age) and females that are gestating (pregnant) or lactating (nursing).



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Importance of hay:

- Critical to the digestive system of your rabbit.
- Helps prevent obesity.
- Provides enrichment and activity by encouraging natural foraging behavior.
- Helps minimize dental disease and assists in dental maintenance.



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Free- standing Hay Feeder

The Living World Green Free-Standing Hay Feeder does not require mounting and fits perfectly inside the Eco Habitat. It is a great way to offer hay to your rabbit as it:

- Manages hay in a neat and central location.
- Ensures that hay stays fresh and clean (by keeping it off the floor of the enclosure).
- Helps reduce hay tracking, minimizing hay-related allergies.



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Enrichment Foods

Although they should be fed in limited quantities, enrichment foods are an important part of your rabbit's diet. They provide additional nutrients and encourage natural foraging behavior; overall they help to maintain a healthier lifestyle for your pet Rabbit.

Enrichment foods should be introduced slowly if your rabbit has never eaten them previously. Feeding excessive amounts may decrease the amount of base diet consumed, lead to obesity, and in the case of fresh vegetables and fruit, diarrhea.

Healthy enrichment foods include the following:

- Fresh, leafy greens (should only be introduced at 4-5 months).
- Other vegetables and fruit such as apple, pineapple, banana, melon, peach, pear, strawberries, raspberries, carrot chunks, romaine lettuce, dandelion greens, parsley, broccoli florets and turnip peelings.
- Nourishing snacks such as Living World Green Salads.

Snack holder

Create an enriching feeding environment with the Living World Green Snack Holder.

- Holds up to 3 of your rabbit's favorite Living World Green Snacks or fresh fruit and veggies!



Salads

Tasty salads awaken your rabbit's senses. They smell great and taste even better!



SUGAR
COLOURANTS
PRESERVATIVES



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Occasional treats

Treats may be fed occasionally in limited quantities. Feeding too many treats will unbalance your rabbit's diet and lead to obesity. It is important to wait until your Rabbit is 4 -5 months to avoid diarrhea.

Triple Baked Stick



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- Helps maintain strong teeth, while keeping your rabbit entertained for hours.
- Designed to fit Living World Green Water Bottle & Treat stand.

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Supplements

If your rabbit is eating a high-quality balanced diet, he should not require supplements. You may offer your rabbit mineral stones to help wear down their teeth, although they are not necessary if you feed your rabbit a constant supply of good-quality hay and hard, long shaped abrasive textured Living World Green extruded morsels. Furthermore, unless your rabbit is still in its growth life-stage or is reproductively active, an excess of calcium may not be advisable as this could lead to kidney and urinary tract illnesses. Please consult your small animal veterinarian to determine if your rabbit requires supplements.

Mineral stone

Living World Green mineral stones are not your everyday boring calcium supplements; they are covered in delicious toppings that are rich in natural cellulose for healthy digestion.

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Keeping your rabbit healthy and entertained

Exercise, Enrichment & Interactive Activities

A healthy lifestyle includes daily exercise and enrichment. Activities that provide exercise, enrichment and human interaction will stimulate the senses, and help prevent your rabbit from being cage bound which can lead to boredom, undesirable behaviors and territoriality. Furthermore these activities will reinforce the human-animal bond & trust; both contributing to your rabbit's level of comfort when being handled, vital for the wellbeing of your relationship.



Why is daily exercise vital for your rabbit?

- Critical to the digestive system of your rabbit.
- Helps prevent obesity.
- Provides enrichment and activity by encouraging natural foraging behavior.
- Helps minimize dental disease and assists in dental maintenance.

Provides mental stimulation and encourages natural foraging behaviour.



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Guidelines for selecting accessories

- Hiding places are great for playing and for reducing stress as they give a sense of security and privacy.
- Chewing toys and grasses are great for mental activity and the wear down of teeth.
- Ensure that all of your rabbit's play items are made from non-toxic substances.
- Check accessories regularly for sharp edges, weak points where pieces can be nibbled off and gaps where feet might get trapped.

The young rabbit will naturally be more active, and therefore need less stimulation to exercise, although this is the perfect opportunity to establish a healthy lifestyle and human companion bond. Desensitizing young rabbits to wearing a harness, going outdoors, spending time in a run or corral and finding comfort in a rabbit proof room exploring for foraging opportunities can contribute to an enriched & healthy lifestyle as they grow older.

New trends have now emerged worldwide with emphasis placed on creating interactive activities with the caretaker such as rabbit agility courses. Although you may not want to enter your rabbit in an agility competition, similar yet simplified activities providing mental and physical stimulation can be part of your exercise routine for your rabbit.



Fun way to provide hay to your Rabbit.

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Indoor exercise

You must ensure the following:

- Designated area is safe and secure; all electrical wires, plants, electrical sockets must be out of reach to prevent chewing and ingestion.
- Furniture is protected from chewing (table and chair legs).
- Keep an eye out on other pets to prevent any potential injuries.
- Ensure your litter trained rabbit has access to a litter box.



Stimulating place to play and hide

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Outdoor Exercise

You must ensure the following:

You will require either a rabbit run/corral or a harness and lead. A comfortable transport cage can be used to transfer your rabbit to its outdoor pen.

Due to rabbits' hypersensitivity to heat, they should be kept out of direct sunlight in warm weather and perhaps not be taken out at all during excessive heat. They should always be supervised when outdoors in a temporary run or corral.



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Considerations for a Run/Corral

You can construct a permanent structure providing the materials used to build this enclosure provide a safe and hygienic environment.

- You may also choose to purchase a moveable run/corral to enable you to relocate the enclosure so that your rabbit can forage on different areas of your lawn.

Note: Exposure or ingestion of grass sprayed with pesticides can be harmful to your rabbit. Furthermore, as with enrichment foods, rabbits must be gradually introduced to grasses and other types of plants such as clover and dandelion growing on your lawn.

- Make sure to have a shelter inside the run/corral to prevent your rabbit from being exposed to rain.
- Make sure to prevent escapes and help protect against predators. Both rabbits and other animal outside of the run can dig their way in or out.

Harness

You must ensure the following:

If you plan to let your rabbit potter around your garden, you could buy a light, nylon rabbit harness to stop him from escaping. Don't pull him on the harness. Always let your rabbit lead you and then pick him up and carry him back to his habitat when playtime is over.



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Health Concerns

You should check your rabbit's health daily so that you can spot any signs of illness before they get serious. A sick rabbit usually seems tired, is less active, and loses his appetite. Litter training your rabbit will help you monitor a healthy amount of feces and urine every day. Training your rabbit to drink from a water bottle will also help you monitor how much water he consumes daily.

Pet rabbits are often challenged with preventable health concerns such as:

- Obesity
- Gastrointestinal & urinary illnesses
- Dental complications
- Hormone excess leading to behavioural problems

Obesity

Companion rabbits are often challenged with obesity which can undoubtedly lead to serious health complications. Regular weight monitoring and routine veterinarian exams will ensure you are actively participating in your pet's health monitoring.

Rabbits over six months old can often become overweight. Therefore try to establish a healthy eating habit as young as possible.



How to maintain a healthy weight?

- Offer an optimal diet (healthy base diet, unlimited amounts of healthy hays & grasses, healthy enrichment foods & occasional treats).
- Offer a healthy diet that is appropriate to your rabbit's life stage and lifestyle.
- Offer a lifestyle that promotes exercise (in a rabbit run, a rabbit proof room or exercised with a harness).

Note: Offering an extruded diet prevents rabbits from only eating the bits of food that they like most in a mixed diet.

Living World Green's extruded diet was formulated without sugar or molasses, and is free of high caloric alfalfa hays and grains in order to promote a healthy weight for pet rabbits.



Gastrointestinal & urinary illnesses

Lazy Gut

Lazy gut or commonly referred to as "hair ball impaction" is a very common condition that if left untreated, can lead to gut stasis (static intestine), which is life threatening.

It does not come from a rabbit ingesting its own hair during grooming. A healthy rabbit should be able to digest his hair without any impaction. With a lazy gut, a hair ball cannot pass through the gastrointestinal tract, causing the impaction.



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What causes a lazy gut?

- Diets low in insoluble fibres
- Obesity
- Lack of exercise
- High caloric diet
- Dehydration

Symptoms of hair ball impaction

- Anorexia
- No passing of feces or a reduced amount of feces in litter pan
- Irritable
- Nippy
- Nervous
- Weak



Living World Green formula for rabbits is formulated with CelluPlus (insoluble fibers) and healthy green peas specifically to encourage a healthy digestion and gut motility.

Bladder and Kidney Disease

Bladder and kidney disease can cause discomfort, pain and can be life-threatening.

What causes bladder and kidney disease?

Excess of calcium in the diet that deposits in the bladder commonly referred to as “sludge or sand”. Living World Green formula for rabbits is formulated to offer a minimal amount of calcium to ensure the health of the growing or mature rabbits, yet prevent kidney and urinary tract illnesses.

Litter training your rabbit will help you recognize the symptoms that may be associated with a bacterial infection of the urinary tract in time to seek medical advice. The inconsistent use of the litter box could highlight a concern.

Note: If your rabbit is not litter trained, then pay attention to the soiling of the substrate. If it is in small quantities randomly throughout the enclosure, then this could also highlight a concern.



Symptoms:

- Unusual urine color (red pigment that could be the result of blood due to the irritation of the bladder).
- Cloudy urine with a thicker texture.
- Nervousness and irritability.
- Pain or discomfort when handled.
- Area around the genitals and urinary tract is not clean, appears to have hair loss, redness, irritation, scabs or dried feces or urine stains.
- Increased water consumption which is easily monitored with a water bottle.
- Reduced appetite, activity and interest in foraging due to pain.

Contributing factors leading to bacterial infections of the urinary tract

- A Diet high in calcium
- An alfalfa based diet
- Excess calcium offered in supplements, enrichment foods & alfalfa hay for the adult (not a reproductively active rabbit)
- Not drinking enough water
- Unhygienic litter box or bedding in enclosure
- A sedentary lifestyle that does not encourage exercise or time out of the enclosure
- Obesity
- Urinary tract & bladder impaction by calcium stones



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Dental Complications

Constantly growing teeth

Your rabbit's teeth grow constantly - up to 13 cm a year. If your rabbit doesn't have anything to chew on, his teeth will quickly become overgrown.

How to keep your rabbit's teeth healthy

- Morsels of hard textured food encourage natural grinding of teeth
- Wooden chews
- Sea grass natural accessories
- Hay

Undiagnosed dental problems such as molar root intrusion will also cause a runny nose, runny eyes and drooling. If your rabbit is drooling or having eating problems, a veterinarian consultation is recommended. The molars situated in the back of the mouth will need to be routinely inspected by a qualified small animal veterinarian.



Normal teeth alignment, where the top incisors are slightly overlapping the bottom ones.

Hormone excess leading to behavioural problems

Besides preventing unwanted pregnancies and illnesses associated with your rabbit's reproductive tract, spaying or neutering alleviates hormonal excesses that often lead to undesirable behaviors such as territoriality, nipping, aggression, spraying and digging, irritability and unnecessary stress.

Other conditions to look out for:

Heatstroke & Chills

When your rabbit is in his run, make sure that he has shelter from the sun. If he gets too hot, he could get heatstroke and this could kill him. Don't forget that the sun moves, so an area of his run that is shady in the morning, probably won't be in the afternoon. If your rabbit does get heatstroke, wrap him in a thick towel that has been soaked in cold water and then wrung out, and seek medical advice immediately. Your rabbit will also need protection from the rain and harsh wind when he is in his run. His fur will get soaked quickly and he is likely to get a chill, which could make him ill.

Eyes and nose

Check your rabbit's eyes and nose every day. Make sure that his eyes are bright and clear. If they are watering, he might have an injury or infection, or it might even be a sign of problems with his teeth. Your rabbit's nose should be clean and not runny. Sneezing, "sniffles", raspy breathing, a runny nose with or without discharge should get immediate veterinarian attention.

Ear maintenance

Routinely inspect ears for cleanliness. Any dry skin, crust-like accumulation or irritation can be a sign of concern. Rabbit ears for most species (except Belier) should rest upright. Any scratching of the ears, head or ear tilt can also be a sign of concern. A veterinarian consultation should be recommended to evaluate any medical condition.



Healthy ear



Unhealthy ear



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Bottom

Check your rabbit's bottom daily. If he has a dirty bottom, it is a sign that he is not well, or is too overweight to clean himself or that the habitat needs cleaning more regularly.

Droppings & diarrhea

Your rabbit's waste droppings should be neat, hard balls. Don't worry if you see a few leftover soft droppings that he passes to eat. However, if there are lots of soft droppings, it usually means that he has diarrhea. You might be able prevent the condition from worsening by stopping to serve him fruit, vegetables and any treats, and only feeding him dry food and Timothy hays and grasses. However it is advisable to seek medical attention for a thorough veterinarian exam to rule out other digestive disorders and ensure normal gut health has returned.

Urine Stains

Urine stains on your rabbit's fur on the feet indicate less than optimal hygienic conditions.

The urine stained fur can be gently washed with rabbit shampoo and warm water, then dried with a dry cloth. Should urine stain the fur when even if your rabbit has been successfully litter trained, then perhaps you do not change the litter box enough or you are not using the right choice of substrate?



Nail Trimming

Regular nail trims should also be part of the grooming routine. Check your pet rabbit's nails once a week and trim them whenever they get too long. Ask your veterinarian or animal caretaker specialist to help you evaluate when grooming is necessary and demonstrate the proper technique. Rabbit nails should maintain a natural curve and therefore allowing the nails to growth too long will make the rabbit uncomfortable and also change the shape of the nail.

Grooming

Your rabbit will clean himself every day with his teeth and claws. You can help by combing him gently every week with a comb (a long-haired rabbit will need combing every day). When he sheds, which usually occurs about every 3 months, brushing him daily is recommended.

This also helps you build your relationship with your pet rabbit, and gives you a chance to check his skin and coat health.

Importance of brushing:

- Removes excess hair, lowering risk of intestinal blockage.
- Removes bedding stuck in fur.
- Keeps skin healthy by improving blood flow.
- Good opportunity to check skin and coat.



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