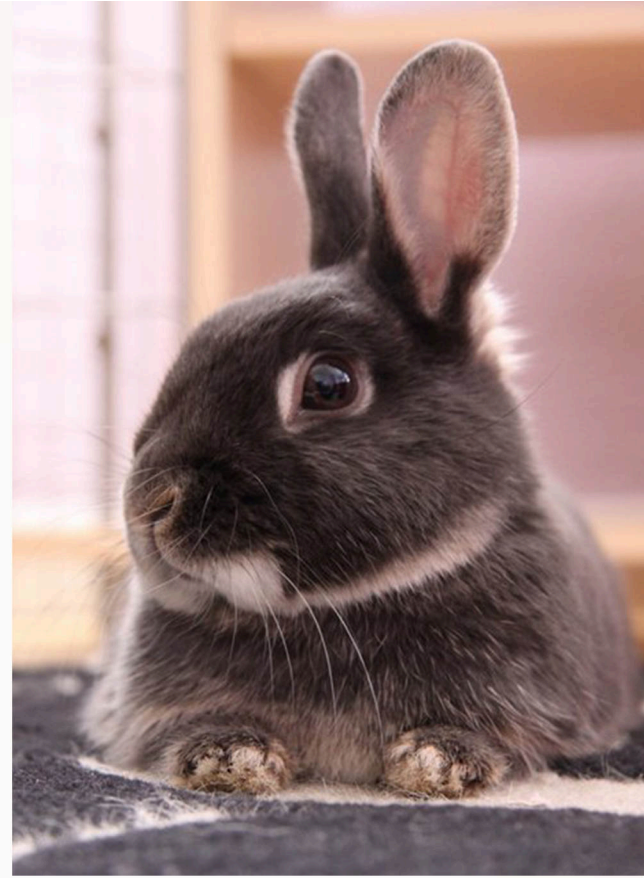


How To Give The Best Care For Your Rabbit

Rabbit Care 1 of 4



BEAUTIFUL BUNNIES

Rabbits are bright, affectionate, inquisitive, gentle and playful, whilst still retaining a charming sense of wildness. They are sociable creatures, enjoying the company of people, rabbits and other animals.

However, it is a misconception that they are the 'ideal first pet' for young children or are low maintenance and inexpensive. Being timid & sensitive animals, they are not generally content to be picked up and cuddled. They do love to be stroked but preferably whilst sitting beside you.

Whilst they make excellent family pets, it is important that adults accept that they will be the ones responsible for providing the majority of the care needed. That cute baby bunny may well require your time and devotion for 6 to 10 years!

ADOPTING A BUNNY

There are benefits to adopting a bunny (or two). Welfare charities and rescue centres have many unwanted bunnies of all ages, shapes and sizes. Bunnies over a year are often easier to litter train and less destructive, especially when neutered. Older ones are often more willing to be petted, as they are less active. Also, it is easier for you to match the right personality to your family.

HABITAT

If you chose to house your bunny outdoor, then provisions must be made for their comfort and safety. People often buy small hutches to go with their small bunny, but bunnies grow and so does their need for space.

Rabbits need a large, solid wooden hutch, treated with waterproof protection, covered with good quality roofing felt and constructed with strong, rigid, wire mesh. Make sure that the hutch is not only long and wide enough, but also high enough to allow your bunny to stand upright if they wish.

Make sure your hutch and run are in a sheltered spot, away from the glare of the sun and the cold draughts. Ideally, you should move your rabbit into a garden shed or outbuilding at night time, to protect them from the cold weather and predators, such as foxes and cats. If this is not possible, always check your rabbits are locked securely (with proper bolts!) in their hutch at night and it is covered with tarpaulin. Rubber carpet underlay is an excellent insulator in winter.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

Use generous amounts of newspaper to absorb the wet, with plenty of clean, soft straw and fresh meadow hay. Woodchip and sawdust should be avoided, as it can irritate rabbits' eyes and nasal passages. Wet bedding and hard droppings should be removed daily, with a full clean at least once a week, using a suitable disinfectant.

Keeping your bunny's hutch clean is essential for his health and comfort. The time and effort required for this continuous task is often underestimated and it is frequently the reason that people get fed up with their bunnies.

Take pleasure in the nurture and care that you give to your little companion; they rely on you. They may not be able to show you how much they appreciate your care, but they really do!



BUNNIES NEED COMPANY

It's essential to your rabbit's welfare that they live in a pair or a group. It is recommended that both of your bunnies are neutered, as this reduces aggression, is essential to prevent breeding and to stop the cycle of unwanted rabbits.

When introducing bunnies to each other, do so on neutral territory. It is normal for them to chase and have scuffles, so you must supervise them initially. Please see our Rabbit Care: Bonding, for more details.

EXERCISE

Adequate exercise is essential to a bunny's well-being.

You need to supply them with a good sized run in addition to their hutch. It must be long enough and wide enough to allow them to have a good scamper.

Again, the construction must be solid, with a roof and sheltered area. Ideally, it should rest on a concrete base, covered in newspaper and straw for easy cleaning.

A supervised run around a secured garden is also most enjoyable for them. Do not leave them unattended though, as they are very vulnerable to predators.

**PLEASE DO NOT LEAVE YOUR BUNNIES IN A HUTCH ALL DAY!
THEY WILL BECOME FRUSTRATED AND DEPRESSED.**



FEEDING

Daily diet should include: fresh unlimited hay with a couple of portions of different vegetables, an egg cup size portion of pellets per bunny per day can also be provided. Apple and pear twigs, dried grass and dandelions are a great source of fibre. Small amounts of fruit and carrot can be offered a few times per week as a treat. If you have grass in your garden, your bunny might like to graze.

Fresh water must be available at all times.

THE HOUSE BUNNY

Traditionally, rabbits have always been housed outside. Although they can experience a wonderful outdoor life, they can be neglected, as tending to them in the rain and cold becomes less appealing and being out of sight can sometimes mean 'out of mind'.

It is becoming more common now, for people to keep bunnies as house pets. Some bunnies are completely free range and sleep in a dogs bed, rather than a cage! We would still recommend house bunnies are kept in bonded pairs/groups.

LITTER TRAINING

Rabbits tend to urinate in one or a few specific places and they are fairly easy to litter train. Start with a single tray in your bunnies pen or living area and at least one other in their exercise area. Fill it with newspaper, covered with hay and straw or a paper-based litter. Do not use wood-based or clumping litter.

Rabbits like to nibble on something as they 'go to the bathroom', so leave their food bowl or a treat in one corner, while encouraging them to use the litter tray.

If your rabbit urinates on the floor, simply add another tray. Later you can remove these extra trays, as they should only use one or two. Be prepared, rabbits do need to re-ingest their soft droppings for nutrients.



INDOOR ACTIVITIES

Rabbits need to chew and dig to keep their teeth and toenails trimmed. If they live indoors, it is wise to cover wallpaper and cover carpets with secured rugs or sea grass mats. Wrap wires and cables in plastic tubing and move houseplants out of reach.

Here are some ideas for indoor playtime:

- Closed cardboard box with doors, clay tubes
- Balls or cubes with holes for treats
- Chew toys: apple twigs, pine cones
- Loo roll tube, yoghurt pots, balls for nudging
- Box of hay, straw or shredded paper to dig
- Litter tray of sand or soil to dig and roll in

HEALTHCARE

As well as preventing unwanted litters, neutering can be beneficial to rabbit's health, ie. preventing potentially fatal conditions such as reproductive cancers and infection of the womb (Pyometra). It also improves litter training, prevents spraying and reduces aggressive and destructive behaviour; allowing two bunnies to live peacefully together. Please see our neutering page for more details.

A male rabbit (buck) can be neutered from 3/4 months and a female (doe) from 5/6 months.

The most important vaccination that your rabbit should have is for Myxomatosis and VHD. Ask your vet for more information. This vaccination is given yearly.

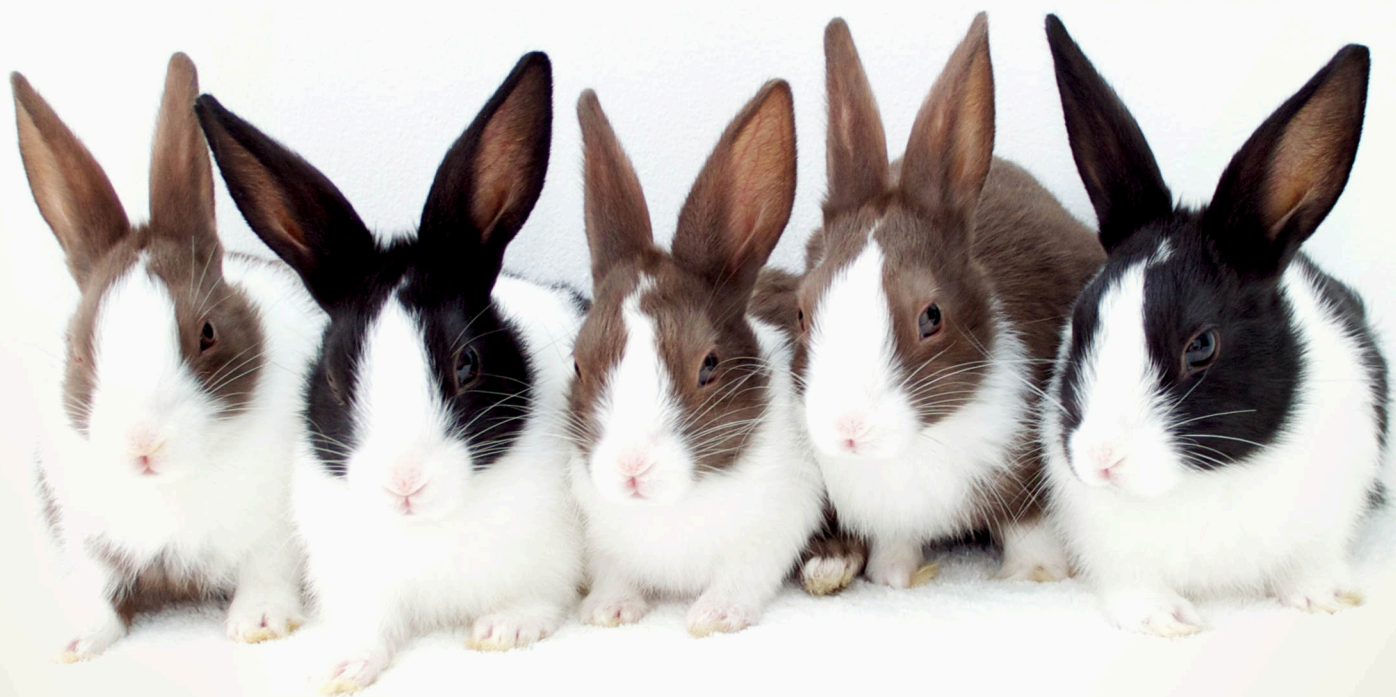
HEALTHCHECKS

Regularly check your bunny for the following possible health problems:

- discharge from eyes or nose
- wet chin or front paws
- dirty bottom (prevention of fly strike)
- loss of fur or sore feet
- overgrown teeth or nails
- swellings or signs of parasites
- loss of appetite or change of behaviour

Any of these problems would require immediate veterinary attention. A rabbit's health can seriously deteriorate within hours. Although a rabbit prefers not to be held it is essential that they accept being handled, in order that they can be checked. Lift them up by supporting them under their forelegs and bottom and holding their back feet securely to prevent kicking.

AS CUTE AS THEY ARE, PLEASE THINK VERY CAREFULLY BEFORE TAKING ON RABBITS.



www.houserabbit.co.uk

The Rabbit Welfare Association website is an excellent source of rabbit welfare and care information

'Please also read Rabbit Care - Neutering, Bonding and Diet'

FOR MORE ADVICE, PLEASE CONTACT US:

P.O. BOX 46, Twickenham, TW1 1WG ☎ 0208 894 4508

www.animalrescueandcare.org.uk ✉ rabbits@animalrescueandcare.org.uk [facebook/ARC.Twickenham](https://www.facebook.com/ARC.Twickenham)

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