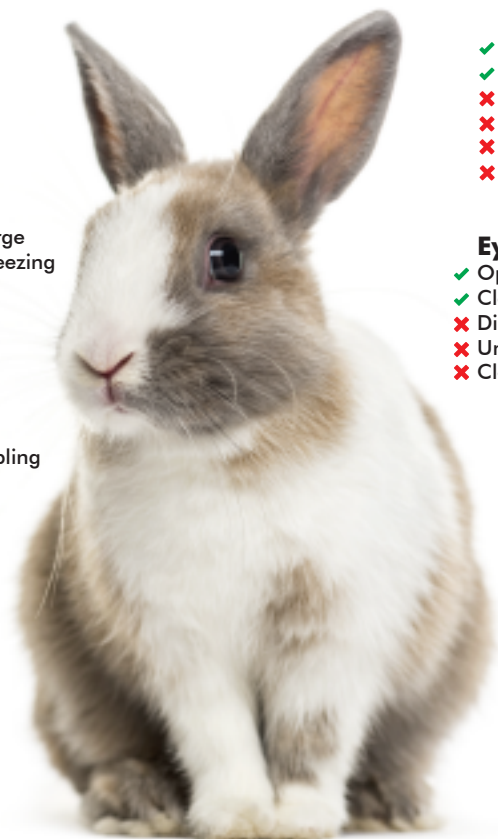


To ensure the rabbit is healthy and not experiencing pain, daily visual health checks should be carried out.



#### Nose

- ✓ Dry
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Sneezing or wheezing

#### Mouth

- ✓ Eating well
- ✓ Aligned teeth
- ✓ Pink gums
- ✗ Dropping food/dribbling
- ✗ Reluctant to eat
- ✗ Overgrown teeth
- ✗ Pale gums

#### Body/Skin

- ✓ Smooth, glossy coat
- ✓ Complete coat
- ✗ Dull coat
- ✗ Bald patches
- ✗ Red/broken skin
- ✗ Scratching

#### Ears

- ✓ Responds to sound
- ✓ Clear
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Smelly
- ✗ Excess wax
- ✗ Visible mites

#### Eyes

- ✓ Open and close freely
- ✓ Clear, bright
- ✗ Discharge
- ✗ Unable to open & close freely
- ✗ Cloudy

#### Legs, feet, claws

- ✓ Move freely
- ✓ Nails not curled over
- ✗ Overgrown claws
- ✗ Reluctant to move/ weight bear

#### Anogenital area

- ✓ Clean and clear
- ✓ Evidence of regular faeces production
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Sticky faeces/ matted fur
- ✗ Smelly
- ✗ Swelling



Pet Industry Federation  
www.petfederation.co.uk  
Company registration no. 7252816



www.mypetpeople.co.uk is the website directory of PIF member businesses for pet owners looking for outstanding services for their pet



# Looking after your Rabbit

## Facts

Rabbits can live for up to 12 years

A rabbit's diet should be predominantly hay or grass

Rabbits are social animals and should be kept in pairs

Rabbits need lots of exercise to prevent them getting bored and fat

To ensure all pet animals are well cared for, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was introduced.

This law states that all animal owners have a legal duty of care to meet their animal's five welfare needs.

The five welfare needs are:

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.



## The need for a suitable environment

It is important to provide your rabbit with safe, suitable accommodation which is clean, comfortable, secure and has appropriate environmental conditions, including temperature, ventilation and drainage.

Rabbits require regular exercise so a large hutch with daily access to a run is essential.

The hutch should have a bedding area containing suitable warm, absorbent bedding material (i.e. chopped straw). The other end of the hutch should contain hay and water.

Rabbits are susceptible to extremes of temperature so the hutch should be placed out of direct sunlight and will require additional covers in the winter. Some owners move the rabbit hutch into a shed or garage during the winter, making sure that there is suitable ventilation and light.

Rabbit accommodation should be cleaned out twice a week to prevent the build up of ammonia and bacteria. Animal safe disinfectants should be used for cleaning the accommodation.



## The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

Your rabbit needs to be provided with the opportunity to express normal, natural behaviours.

In the wild, rabbits travel up to two miles a day and are active for up to 14 hours a day, so a regular opportunity to dig, explore and hop about is essential for maintaining the animal's welfare.

It is recommended that rabbits are kept in pairs and are provided with daily access to a run to allow them to perform natural behaviours. There are also a variety of toys and enrichment objects which can be provided to help keep the rabbit occupied and prevent unwanted behaviour.

## The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals

Rabbits are social animals, so they should be kept in same sex pairs (or be neutered to prevent unplanned breeding).

## The need for a suitable diet

For a rabbit this means providing it with its own body size in hay or grass each day. The diet can also be supplemented by small amounts of green leafy vegetables and an eggcup full of either rabbit muesli or nuggets. Fresh water must always be available to the rabbit.



## The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

By providing a suitable diet and accommodation the rabbit will be less likely to develop certain diseases and disorders.

To ensure rabbits do not experience pain when being handled, they should be handled correctly. Small children should not be encouraged to pick up the rabbit, rather place it in front of them and allow them to gently stroke it.

Should the rabbit become ill, providing suitable care and, where necessary, veterinary treatment is essential. Some common rabbit diseases are:

Not providing the correct diet to a rabbit can lead to a number of health problems including:

- Obesity – identified by fat deposits around the rabbit's neck
- Dental problems - their teeth continually grow and need to eat often to wear them down
- Gut stasis - a deadly disease where their digestive system slows down or stops
- Bumblefoot - a bacterial disease, also known as 'sore hocks'

- **Flystrike** - in the summer months flies are drawn to any wet or matted faeces around the rabbit's bottom. The flies lay their eggs in the faeces, the eggs hatch into maggots and the rabbits begin eating the rabbits flesh. It is important to keep a rabbit's bottom clean and dry
- **Parasites** – rabbits can suffer from intestinal worms, ticks and fleas. Regular treatment with preventative treatment will prevent infestation
- **Myxomatosis** – this is a contagious and fatal disease spread by wild rabbits. It is recommended that all pet rabbits are vaccinated against this and viral hemorrhagic disease (VHD)