

Companionship

Rabbits are sociable animals and should be kept in pairs or groups, unless a houserabbit with lots of human contact. The companionship and social interaction provided by another rabbit is ideal and much more suitable than housing with another species such as a guinea pig which we would not as a rule advocate. A neutered male and female combination works best, but 2 neutered females can also live together happily. The key to having a 'bonded' pair or group of rabbits is in a proper introduction process so please ask for advice on how to do this (or ask for a copy of our bunny buddies leaflet) and the rabbits should also be neutered to avoid any unwanted litters as well as to ensure they live harmoniously together.

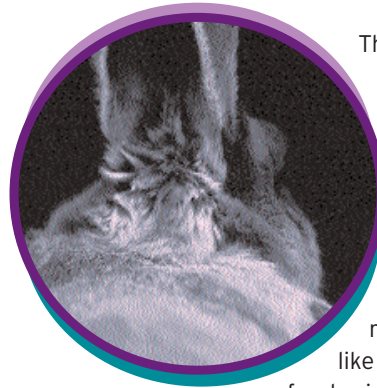


KEY POINT - rabbits should never be kept alone.

Health Care

Annual or twice yearly trips to the vets are a must for their vaccinations (both for myxomatosis and VHD). Rabbits are prey animals and they hide pain well, so be aware of any subtle changes in behaviour or diet and take them to the vet immediately if you are worried. Regular mini MOTs at home can be invaluable ensuring teeth and nails are not overly long, your rabbit isn't gaining or losing weight, and very importantly that once if not twice a day you check your rabbits bottom for signs of soiling to ensure that flystrike does not become an issue.

KEY POINT - rabbits should be neutered and vaccinated. Always see a vet if you think your rabbit is unwell.



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

If you love rabbits, please consider supporting the Rabbit Welfare Fund. You can make a donation, or you may like to join the RWA. As well as

fund-raising activities, most RWA

members kindly make a small donation to the RWF in addition to their annual RWA membership fee. RWA members receive a fabulous quarterly magazine packed with health, behaviour and care advice to help you to build a wonderful relationship with your bunny - whether she/he lives indoors or out.

To contact the RWA/Rabbit Welfare Fund:

Ring the RWA National Helpline on 0844 324 6090

Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham,
West Sussex RH13 5WL.

Log onto our websites

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk>

<http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk>

Contact the National Helpline to order bulk supplies of leaflets or send SAE for single copies.



Rabbit Welfare Fund
Write to us at PO Box 603,
Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL.
e-mail: hq@rabbitwelfare.co.uk
Registered Charity Number 1085689

Rabbit owners

-don't get caught out
by the
Animal Welfare Bill!



Animal Welfare Act - what it means for rabbits and their owners

The new Animal Welfare Act is the most innovative piece of animal legislation for almost 100 years. In real terms it means that the law now has the teeth to intervene before cruelty has been inflicted upon an animal, by placing a 'duty of care' on the owner / guardian of all pet animals.

When does the new law come into effect?

From 6 April 2007 in England, and in Wales from 27 March, the animal welfare law is being improved.

It is still against the law to be cruel to an animal, but now you must also ensure that all the welfare needs of your animals are met.

What does the new law do?

It makes owners and keepers responsible for ensuring that the welfare needs of their animals are met. These include the need:

- For a suitable environment (place to live)
- For a suitable diet
- To exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- To be housed with, or apart from, other animals (if applicable)
- To be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease
- The new law also increases to 16 the minimum age at which a person can buy an animal and prohibits giving animals as prizes to unaccompanied children under this age.

Anyone who is cruel to an animal, or does not provide for its welfare needs, may be banned from owning animals, fined up to £20,000 and/or sent to prison.

What does it mean to me and my rabbit?

It's not acceptable to keep a solitary rabbit in a small hutch, without the opportunity to exercise. Sadly we know that this is still the case for thousands of pet rabbits in the UK, as they are the most neglected domestic pet. Make sure that you are providing your rabbits with everything they need to live a long and happy life.

The Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund suggest the following to properly care for your pet rabbits:

Environment

Hutches should be a minimum of 6ft x 2ft x 2ft, and preferably with an attached run to allow the rabbits to exercise at will. The run should be 8ft x 4ft x 4ft as a minimum.



Hutch size and runs can never be too big, so don't skimp, and remember that a baby rabbit will grow so never be tempted by the 'starter hutches' as they are a false economy. You don't have to stick to the traditional hutch as a garden shed, or child's wooden

Wendy house can both make fabulous 'warrens'. Many rabbit owners put a cat flap in their garden sheds to an outdoor run so that the rabbits can exercise when they please, and bird aviaries can make great homes and they have the added benefit that you can walk around in them so no more stooping to get the rabbit out of the run! Ready made dog kennels and runs are a great alternative too.



KEY POINT - hutches can never be too big, make sure yours is no smaller than 6ft x 2ft x 2ft

Diet

Did you know that in the wild rabbits will spend 80% of their time foraging for food; providing your rabbits with a bowl of concentrated rabbit mix and a carrot won't occupy them for very long and it leaves them a lot of time to get bored and chew their hutch! Not only is a good diet the cornerstone of a healthy rabbit it can also prevent boredom as hay and grass can be fed ad-lib and be munched on all day. Therefore a diet that mimics a natural diet, that is one which is mainly hay or grass, with a smaller proportion of greens and rabbit pellets is ideal. Any changes to the diet should be made gradually watching out for upset tummies and closely checking at least once if not twice a day for flystrike. Be imaginative when you feed your rabbits, for example chop up pieces of carrot and put them in the bottom of a plant pot with hay on top so that they have to 'forage' to get the carrots. Fresh water should be available at all times.

KEY POINT - stick to a natural based diet; unlimited hay/grass and smaller quantities of greens and rabbit food.

Behaviour

Rabbits like to dig, run and hide. Rabbit nirvana would be free access to your garden everyday, digging, foraging and running as they please. Unfortunately this is not always practical as the garden may not be rabbit proof, and they are at risk from predators such as cats. If it's not safe to allow them to roam in your garden then they should be provided with the opportunity to exercise and run everyday. Ideally a run attached to their hutch, or even better a garden shed with attached enclosure. If you have ever seen your rabbit running round the garden and 'binkying' (literally jumping for joy) you'll understand how important exercise is for them. You can allow your pet rabbits to display their natural digging behaviour by providing a big planter filled with earth so that they can really get stuck in and why not put turf on the top too so that they can forage at the same time. This will also help to keep their nails short. Don't forget that rabbits are a prey animal, so they must always have somewhere to 'bolt' to in their exercise area.

KEY POINT - allow your rabbits the chance to run and dig every day.