

Your New Rabbit



*The world is a nicer place for me...
because you are in it.*

Thanks for adopting me!



Contents

Need Help or Advice?	3
Your New Rabbit Information	4
First Few Weeks in a New Home.....	5
A Rabbit in the House	6
Dietary Recommendations.....	10
Medical Concerns.....	11
Sacramento Area Veterinarians.....	13
Reading Your Rabbit.....	14
Training Your Rabbit.....	15
Litter-training Your Rabbit.....	17
Heat Danger	18
Obesity	20
Safe Grooming Techniques	22
Introducing Rabbits	25
9 Common Rabbit Myths.....	27



Sacramento
House Rabbit Society

Compiled by the Sacramento House Rabbit Society, July 2009
P.O. Box 19850, Sacramento, CA 95819-0850



Need Help or Advice?

Use the following telephone numbers and email addresses for help.

House Rabbit Society:

Sacramento HRS website: www.allearssac.org

National HRS website: www.rabbit.org

Sacramento HRS hotline: 916-863-9690

Hotline is staffed by volunteers who will make every attempt to return your call within 24 hours

Foster Parent:

The foster parent has volunteered to be available to you for any questions about your new bunny. Please feel free to call them.

Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Adoption Coordinators:

These coordinators have volunteered to answer questions or concerns about your rabbit, bonding procedures or the adoption process.

Coordinator: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____



Your New Rabbit Information

Name: _____ Age: _____

Breed/Color: _____ Weight: _____

Spayed/neutered date: _____

Rescued from: _____

Foster parent: _____

Diet History

It is important to keep your rabbit on the same diet. Pellet food changes must be made gradually to prevent intestinal problems.

Food your rabbit is used to eating:

Pellet food: _____

Hay: _____

Veggies: _____

Fruits: _____

Health History

Vet: _____

phone number: _____

Last checkup: _____

Notes: _____

Habits and Personality

This is what your new bunny likes, dislikes, and other fun facts about him:



First Few Weeks in a New Home

by Amy Espie

During these early days your new family member may not “be himself”. During this volatile period, the two most important contributions you can make are: set up a friendly, safe environment; and let him set the pace for getting acquainted. When you first bring home a rabbit, one of the most useful tools for helping him to feel at ease is your imagination. How do you and your household look to him? Add a little common sense, a dash of patience, and a few basics of rabbit care and behavior, and you’ve got a recipe for a lifelong friendship.

While you are observing and learning about him, bear in mind that during these early days he may not “be himself.” He or she may be too scared to show you how affectionate he’s going to be once he recovers from the shock of relocation. He may have too much on his mind to be anything but perfectly box-trained; in a few weeks, when he’s feeling more at home, he may need a course in Litterbox101. He may be feeling so insecure that territorial marking is almost an obsession. He may be too scared to let you hold or touch him; or he may be too scared to tell you he doesn’t like to be held. He may seem extraordinarily loving and affectionate, leaving you stunned and confused when this hormone-driven behavior decreases in the weeks following spay/neuter. Or he may be one of those rare mellow, confident individuals whose new family needs none of the following suggestions.

During this period, the two most important contributions you can make are: set up a friendly, safe environment; and let him set the pace for getting acquainted.

Home Base

Set up a small area or roomy cage (or both). Use a laundry room, bathroom, hallway blocked off with baby gates, or part of a larger room sectioned off using furniture, boxes, or other objects he can’t scale or knock over. Choose a spot that gets some regular, not-too-noisy traffic, where he can see and hear but not be trampled by your daily routines. Start housetraining by providing at least one or two litterboxes. A fresh layer of grass hay on top will both encourage and reward him for hopping in. Keep him on the same brand of food he is used to (or if you are going to shift to a new brand, do it gradually). Fresh water in a bowl or bottle should be available at all times. Give him at least one cardboard box with two bunny-size doors cut, and a towel draped across one area of his cage, as hiding places. Start him on the road to good chewing habits by removing forbidden and dangerous temptations

such as house plants, electric cords, and books. Provide permitted alternatives such as untreated straw, wicker, or sea-grass baskets and mats (available at import stores such as Pier 1), cardboard tubes and boxes, plastic baby-toys for tossing, fruit-tree branches, and plenty of fresh hay.

Great Expectations, and what to do about them

As with good housetraining habits, building a friendship may take time and patience. If he’s not ready to be petted yet, caress him with your voice. Talk to him, or to anyone while in his presence. Many rabbits seem to enjoy listening to their humans talk on the phone. Hang out with him in rabbit fashion, by sitting quietly on the floor. Show him that he can hop over to you, take a few get-acquainted sniffs and gentle nibbles, and then hop away again. This hands-off approach paves the way to a hands-on friendship, especially with shy or traumatized rabbits. As his fear diminishes, his curiosity increases. Place a small treat or two (a sprig of parsley or carrot-top, a sliver of apple) and a few toys on the floor next to you, to make his visit even more rewarding.

If no other humans are around, you might want to say your first few words in Rabbit. Tell your new friend how happy, content, calm, and delighted you feel in his company. You may not be able, as he is, to “comb” your long silky ears between your hands — but you can pretend to wash your face the way he does, using hands and tongue. When he responds by grooming himself, it means you’re way cool, practically an Honorary Rabbit.

When adding a rabbit to your family, you may be ready right away to give and receive generous amounts of love and affection. Keep in mind that you’re not the one who has just arrived in a strange place, populated by foreigners who don’t speak your language. Imagine how you would feel if the size difference between you were reversed: a giant hand reaches down and plucks you from your home. It sets you down on a planet of 2-ton, 30-foot-tall beings — a sort of giraffe/elephant hybrid. How long before you’d feel relaxed? What would be your instinctive reaction when one of these giants came lumbering over? Is that a smile on the enormous creature’s face, or a grimace? Only time (plus the occasional raisin or banana slice) will tell your new companion that she’s among friends. §



A Rabbit in the House

by Amy Shapiro and Nancy LaRoche

Rabbits are very special animals. They are bright, interesting, inquisitive, loyal, affectionate — a joy to watch, to touch, to be with. Like us, they are individuals. Caring for a rabbit means getting to know him or her, a process that takes time and patience.

Rabbits respond to love and attention. If you leave him alone in a cage or hutch all the time, you will be missing the best part of knowing your rabbit. Isolated rabbits become bored and withdrawn. They may also have undetected illnesses.

Choosing a Rabbit

One of the best places to get a rabbit is from a rescue group or an animal shelter. Although you can get rabbits from breeders, pet stores, or people who wanted “just one litter,” we urge you to avoid these sources. Most pet stores sell animals:

- with physical and emotional problems (roughly 80% of these rabbits die within the first week at home);
- confidently declare the sex of rabbits but are wrong at least 50% of the time (as are vets who don’t have a specialty in rabbits);
- offer all kinds of advice about caring for rabbits that is almost always based on selling products.

Further, *buying* a rabbit from any of these sources contributes to the suffering of many more bunnies. Economic gain, breeding of show animals, and breeding “just for fun” are major causes of the overpopulation of companion animals. Every year 15 million cats, dogs,

rabbits, and others are destroyed at shelters in this country, and millions more die agonizing deaths without ever reaching a shelter. Each purchase profits someone who will then want to breed more. Rather than contributing to this horribly cruel problem, be part of the solution by saving a life. Get good information from the House Rabbit Society about rabbit care, and then adopt a bunny who needs a home.

Breeds

Breed generalizations are easy to make and easier still to find exceptions to. You may hear that a certain breed is mellow, or good with children, but in fact there is no such thing as a “good with children” gene. Choose a rabbit as you would choose any friend, not by his appearance but by who he is underneath his floppy ears or spotted coat. Visit your local HRS foster home or shelter. Spend time with a variety of rabbits to get a sense of who they are and the “chemistry” between you. Sit quietly and give the rabbit a chance to show you his unique personality.

Age

People often assume that baby bunnies are more easily housetrained and that they can be held frequently so that as adults they won’t mind being handled, held, cuddled, and carried around. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Being held and cuddled is something that very few rabbits of any age enjoy. As ground-loving creatures, a hug means restraint at a high altitude, not an expression of affection. Baby bunnies are so full of energy and curiosity about the world that they often hate being restrained. And like puppies or young humans, they can’t be expected to have good control of elimination. Even when such control is gained, they may be too busy chewing your shoes, books, telephone cords, remote control, etc., to be bothered to return to the litterbox.

In the first year of life, most bunnies go through some personality changes. The precious little ball of fur who may have tolerated being snuggled may suddenly become the bunny from hell as his or her hormones being making themselves felt. A hissing, nipping and apparently furious little beast now inhabits that soft furry little body. You may be subjected to golden showers sprayed on you, your kids, and your furniture, and to attacks on legs and arms as your bunny experiences the powerful urges of sexual maturity.



House rabbits love to interact with their family



But wait, there's more. Your precious little pet may be so unpredictable that you never know whether to expect warm little kisses or painful nips. Litter training becomes a distant memory. You and your possession are subject to severe attacks of tooth and claw. And just as you are wondering whether moving and leaving her behind is too extreme a solution, the little monster sits up, looks adorable, and gently nuzzles your hand, melting your heart.

Unless you are one of those special people willing to put up with the turmoil of the first year without losing patience, and willing to replace or repair the damage inflicted on your home, do not adopt a rabbit under a year old.

Handling

Many people are surprised and disappointed to find that rabbits rarely conform to the cute-n-cuddly stereotype prevalent in children's stories. Bugs Bunny, with his independence, mischievousness, and strong sense of self is a more accurate portrait. Can you imagine Bugs tolerating huge quantities of gooey affection or allowing himself to be carried around in some mere human's arms?

Rabbits can be taught to accept routine handling, but there is nothing abnormal about a bunny who prefers to sit beside you rather than on your lap.

Housing

Indoors or Outdoors?

You will get the most enjoyment from your rabbit — and vice versa — if he lives in your home with you. People sometimes consign rabbits to life in a hutch in the yard because they do not realize what wonderful house companions rabbits can be. With a little training, your rabbit can be a delightful addition to your household.

You may want to set up an outdoor run where Thumper can spend a few hours during the day, sniffing and hopping around and enjoying the sunshine. A few basics to remember when building an outdoor area: fresh cool water at all times; a protected corner, shaded from wind and sun; a roof to keep out raccoons and other predators; a fence that angles down several feet underground, otherwise your rabbit will soon dig his way out of his run.

To Cage or Not to Cage

The main reasons for caging a rabbit are if she is not litterbox-trained and if she chews on forbidden objects.

The extent to which your rabbit can be trained will determine how much freedom it is safe to give her.

Most rabbits like to have a cage, a secure place that is their own, where they can be quiet and alone sometimes. Here are some considerations in choosing or building a cage. First, bigger is better. However, a large cage is not a substitute for free-running time. When she's in her large cage or habitat, she may be getting some physical exercise, but unless you're in there with her, she's not getting much social exercise. At minimum the cage should be four times the size of your bunny when she is full-grown. A slatted floor is more comfortable than a wire one; if you do get a wire floor, be sure to provide a wood or cardboard area as relief.

Fresh cool water (changed daily) should be available at all times. Make sure the water bowl or bottle is not in direct sunlight. If you use a bottle, check the release action regularly to see that water is actually coming out of the metal tube. Both food and water bowls should be heavy enough that they cannot be tipped over (a favorite bunny pastime).

Put a litterbox inside the cage. If your rabbit learns to use one in the cage, then housetraining out of the cage will be easier. Many rabbits will select one corner of the cage as a toilet area. If yours does this, by all means put the box in that spot. (More on litterboxes below.)

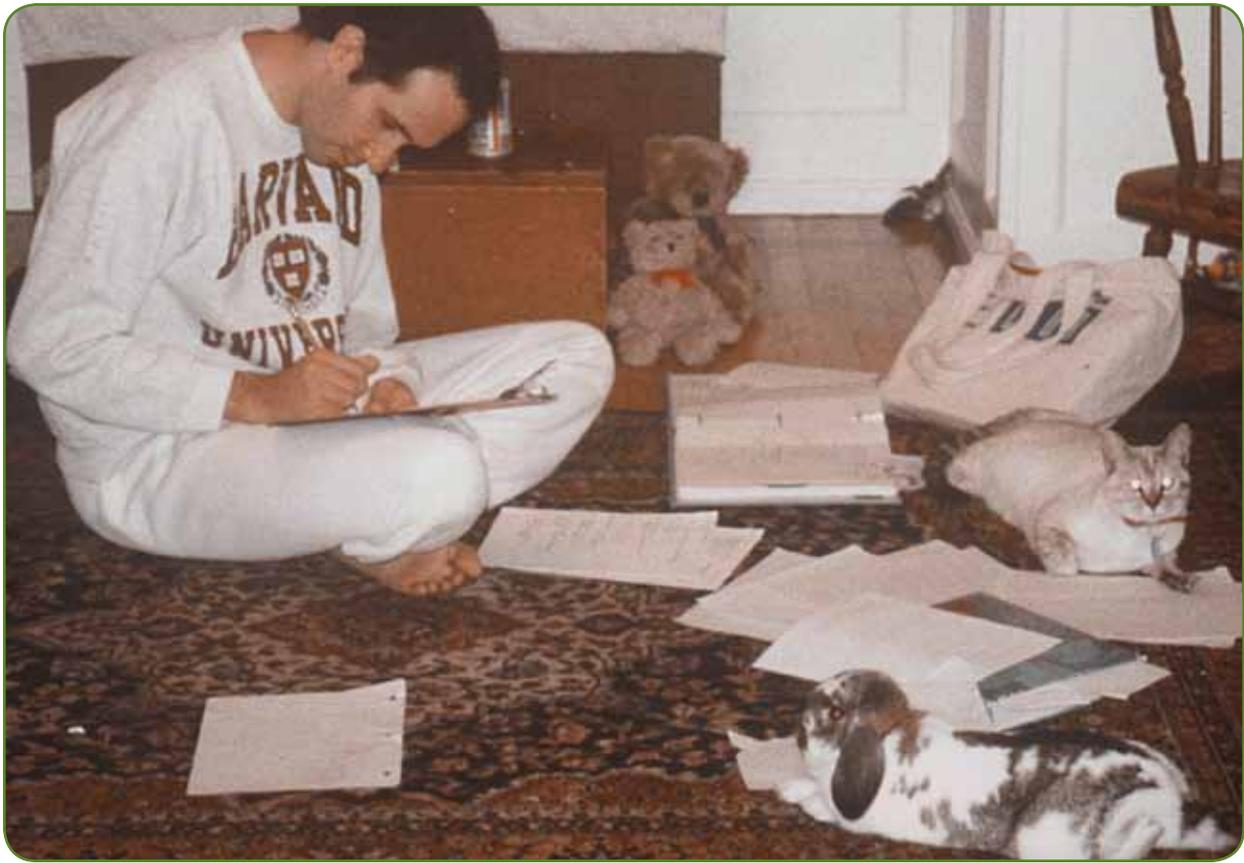
Many rabbits like to have a private area in the cage. A cardboard or wooden box makes an excellent place for Thumper to feel that he is in his "burrow." A towel over one corner of the cage also provides privacy.

Rabbits and...

As social animals, rabbits enjoy the company of other living beings. In addition to his human friends, your rabbit can get along with other rabbits, cats, guinea pigs, and well-behaved dogs. Introduction to another rabbit should take place on neutral territory. If both rabbits are altered, their chances of forming a long-lasting bond is strong. Two males will rarely become friends, but two females or a neutered male and a spayed female can double the pleasure of sharing your life with a rabbit. The get-acquainted period can last anywhere from a few minutes (love at first sight) to a few weeks. It usually includes a fair amount of chasing, nipping, time-outs, then more chasing, etc. Eventually they will work out who's boss, and the deep friendship can begin.

continued





Cats and rabbits can get along very well

Cats and rabbits generally work out their relationship with little help from humans, especially if the rabbit is confident and does not run from the cat. In fact, many rabbits will boss their feline housemates, chasing them and nudging them from favored spots. If the rabbit does run from the cat, then introductions should take place with Thumper in his cage. Most rabbits feel more at ease in their cage, which is their familiar safe haven. Alternatively, hold the cat on your lap, and allow the rabbit to investigate at his own pace.

Similar guidelines apply to dog/rabbit introductions. If the dog knows some obedience words, she can be put in a down-stay so Thumper can get to know her at his own level. Use a leash to control the dog if she is not trained.

Contrary to Eastertime hype, rabbits are rarely a good choice of companion for a small child. The natural exuberance, rambunctiousness, and decibel-level of even the gentlest toddler stressful for rabbits. Children want a companion they can hold and cuddle; rabbits need some one who understands that they are ground-loving creatures. It is unreasonable to expect a child to take full responsibility for care of a rabbit. Unless the adults of the household are enthusiastic and informed about the work involved, do not adopt a rabbit, at Easter or any other

time. An easygoing, low-maintenance plush bunny from your friendly neighborhood toy store makes a great pal for a young child.

Neutering

Neutering is one of the best things you can do for your rabbit to help him or her live a long, happy life as a member of your household. Females should be spayed at 6 months, males neutered at 4 months. The behavior changes that accompany sexual maturity include aggressiveness, extreme mood swings, spraying, and loss of houstraining. Neutering will cure all these problems, but it does not change your bunny's personality. An assertive friendly bunny does not lose her liveliness or responsiveness. The mood swings caused by her fertility cycle will ease, but playfulness and inquisitiveness (to say nothing of all-around cuteness) do not disappear.

Every year, thousands of wonderful rabbits are euthanized at animal shelters nationwide. Thousands more are abandoned in fields. The reason for this tragic situation is that there are simply more great rabbits than there are responsible humans to care for them. Please do not contribute to this problem by allowing your rabbit to have even one litter.

You can also help solve the rabbit overpopulation tragedy by adopting from a shelter or rescue group, or



finding someone who is planning to get rid of a rabbit. It's a sad fact, but no matter where you live, you are always within ten miles or so of a rabbit who needs a home. It may take a little more time and effort to find just the right one for you, but don't the rabbits deserve all the help we can give them?

Housetraining

Yes, rabbits can be trained to use a litterbox. In fact, some rabbits simply train themselves — you supply the box and they do the rest. Most rabbits need a little help from their human friends.

The first step is to keep a box in the rabbit's cage, as described above. Provide at least one more box outside the cage. If you give Thumper several "right places" to go, you increase his chances of success.

You can use organic litters made from alfalfa, oat or paper (some brands to look for: Care Fresh, Yesterday's News, Cat Country, Critter Country). A wonderful and inexpensive litter is wood stove pellets, which can be purchased at home improvement stores. Straw, shredded newspaper, or corncob also can be used as litter. Recent studies have shown that pine and cedar shavings can cause liver damage in rabbits, so stay away from these products. Experiment with different fillers if your rabbit is not using his box. Some have definite preferences in this matter.

Encourage your rabbit to use his box(es) by luring him (with a treat) to the box and giving him praise and the treat when he is in the box. Many rabbits will sit in the box and groom themselves or even take a nap. This is wonderful behavior! Let Thumper know he is doing the right thing. Place a handful of hay in one corner of the box daily for him to munch.

If you want to get fancy about it and amaze your friends at the same time, teach your rabbit to go to his box on command. As you are luring him to the box, say, "Hop in your box," or maybe "Hop to it." Repeat this lesson over and over. If Thumper really wants that treat, he will obey your request. Training requires patience and enthusiasm, but the rewards are worth the effort.

Reprimands and punishment have no place in house-training. If your bunny is soiling outside the box, he is not yet ready to have run of the house. Keep him in his cage when you are not around to supervise and work on training.

Thumper may occasionally urinate or defecate outside the box. Often this behavior is caused by excitement, for instance, when he is first let out of his cage in the

morning. Fortunately, rabbit droppings are easy to clean up. Unneutered rabbits of both sexes have a tendency to mark their territory by spraying urine and defecating outside the litterbox.

Destructive Chewing

Rabbits love to chew. It is as natural for them as digging, hopping, sniffing and being adorable. Helping your rabbit adapt to our human environment means teaching her what she is and is not allowed to chew.

Provide plenty of plain untreated wood, branches, and twigs. Offer these to your rabbit and encourage her to nibble on them. Stay away from redwood, which may be toxic for rabbits. Give her plenty of hay to munch on; it is good for her digestion as well. A cardboard or wooden box makes a delectable, inexpensive "edible" house.

One of the greatest household dangers to rabbits is electrical cords. Most rabbits find them irresistible. Unless you want to switch to a totally battery-operated house, you will need to do some rabbit-proofing. Put cords out of reach wherever possible, behind furniture. You can buy heavy plastic cord-covering material at a lighting-supply store. Hardware stores sell clear plastic hosing that can be slit lengthwise and wrapped around electric cords. Until all cords are protected, do not allow Thumper unsupervised time out of his cage; the results could be fatal.

To teach him not to chew on furniture and rugs, place lots of permitted chewing objects all around the house, as well as in his cage. When he goes after anything he is not allowed to chew, tell him "no" and immediately distract him with some wood, cardboard, or other chewable toy. Repeat this lesson as often as necessary. Be patient, especially if you have a young bunny. He will learn, in time. Spray commercial cat or dog repellents on furniture and rugs to discourage chewing.

To be befriended by a rabbit is a great privilege. If you adopt your bunny from a shelter or a rescue group, you will have the added satisfaction of knowing you have saved a life. In addition to being amusing and enjoyable, sharing your life with a rabbit is also one of the surest ways to become sympathetic to the animal-rights movement. Once you realize that these sensitive, intelligent creatures are the same ones being subjected to the cruel and unnecessary punishment of laboratories, breeding mills, and factory farms, your perspective will be changed forever. §



Good Veggies for Bunnies

alfalfa sprouts
basil
beet greens (tops)
bok choy
broccoli (mostly leaves/stems)
Brussels sprouts
carrots and carrot tops
celery (chop in small pieces)
cilantro
clover, clover sprouts
collard greens
dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides)
endive
escarole
green peppers
mint
parsley
pea pods (the flat edible kind)
peppermint leaves
raddichio
radish sprouts, tops
raspberry leaves
romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf lettuce)
watercress
wheat grass

Veggies to Give Occasionally

kale
mustard greens
spinach
Swiss chard

Special Treats

apple
bananas
blueberries
cranberries (dried)
grapes
melon
orange
papaya
peach, pear
pineapple
plums
raspberries
strawberries

Dietary Recommendations

by Sandi Ackerman

A rabbit's diet should be made up of good quality pellets, fresh hay, (alfalfa, timothy or oat), water and fresh vegetables. Anything beyond that is a "treat" and should be given in limited quantities.

Pellets should be fresh, and should be relatively high in fiber (18% minimum fiber). Do not purchase more than 6 weeks worth of feed at a time, as it will become spoiled. Pellets should make up less of a rabbit's diet as he or she grows older, and hay should be available 24 hours a day.

When shopping for vegetables, look for a selection of different veggies (see sidebar). Look for both dark leafy veggies and root vegetables, and try to get different colors. Stay away from beans, corn and rhubarb.

Hay is essential to a rabbit's good health, providing roughage which reduces the danger of hairballs and other blockages. Apple tree twigs also provide good roughage, just be sure to let them dry for three months before given them to your bunny.

Babies and "teenagers"

- Birth to 3 weeks — mother's milk
- 3 to 4 weeks — mother's milk, nibbles of alfalfa and pellets
- 4 to 7 weeks — mother's milk, access to alfalfa and pellets
- 7 weeks to 7 months — unlimited pellets, unlimited hay
- 12 weeks — introduce vegetables (one at a time, quantities under 1/2 oz.)

Young Adults (7 months to 1 year)

- introduce grass and oat hays, decrease alfalfa
- decrease pellets to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs. body weight
- increase daily vegetables gradually
- fruit daily ration no more than 1–2 oz. (1–2 tablespoons) per 6 lbs. body weight (because of calories)

Mature Adults (1–5 years)

- Unlimited grass hay, oat hay, straw
- 1/4 to 1/2 cup pellets per 6 lbs. body weight (depending on metabolism and/or proportionate to veggies)
- Minimum 2 cups chopped vegetables per 6 lbs. body weight
- fruit daily ration no more than 2 oz. per 6 lbs. body weight

Senior Rabbits (over 6 years)

- If sufficient weight is maintained, continue adult diet
- Frail, older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets to keep weight up. Alfalfa can be given to underweight rabbits, only if calcium levels are normal. Annual blood workups are highly recommended for geriatric rabbits.



Medical Concerns

by Sandi Ackerman

Red Urine

Rabbits' urine varies in color from clear to yellow to brown to bright red. This is usually not a cause for alarm unless there are additional signs such as sitting and straining to urinate, loss of appetite or temperature. When you see red urine, don't panic. Just keep your eyes open for other signs that might indicate a problem. If in doubt, you can have your veterinarian test to see whether there is blood in the urine.

Amoxicillin Danger

Never let a veterinarian give your rabbit amoxicillin. It is a pink liquid antibiotic that smells like bubble gum. Amoxicillin is very dangerous for rabbits, and has killed many more than it has helped. Any penicillin-based drug can be dangerous for your rabbit, so try to find a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about rabbit-safe antibiotics, and who is familiar with the safer drugs such as Chloramphenicol, Tetracycline, sulfa-drugs based like Septra or TMS, or enrofloxins such as Baytril or Cipro.

Cedar and Pine Shavings

These are very bad for your rabbit and other pets. The aromatic hydrocarbons produced from softwood beddings can cause both respiratory and liver damage in rabbits and other small animals. Use organic litter in the litter box and put newspaper in the cage tray.

Spay/Neuter

The House Rabbit Society has had over 1000 rabbits spayed or neutered with approximately .1% mortality due to anesthesia. On the other hand, the risk of reproductive cancer (which is fatal) for an unspayed female rabbit stands at approximately 85%, which makes spaying a necessity. For male rabbits, the benefits are primarily behavioral (eliminating spraying and hormone-related aggression), but are just as important. A knowledgeable rabbit veterinarian can spay or neuter your rabbit with very little risk to a healthy rabbit.



This rabbit has a severe case of malocclusion

Teeth

Rabbits' teeth can be misaligned. This condition is known as malocclusion, which means that a rabbit's constantly-growing teeth are not wearing down properly. If the misalignment is bad, the teeth will need to be clipped periodically so that the rabbit can eat. Your veterinarian can do this for you, or can show you how to do it at home. Usually malocclusion just strikes the front teeth, but occasionally, the back teeth can also be misaligned. One indication of this is a wet chin that is caused by drooling. If this is the case, your rabbit will need his molars trimmed by a veterinarian on a regular basis.

Hairballs

Rabbits shed their hair every three months. Every second shedding is light, followed three months later by a heavy shedding. This is an important factor in rabbit deaths. You need to brush and comb your rabbit to get the hair off of them when they start to shed. Rabbits groom themselves like cats and will ingest all of the loose hair, which they cannot vomit as can cats. For this reason, besides regular grooming, they must have constant access to fresh hay every day, as the fiber helps the hair pass through the digestive system. You can also give your rabbit cat hairball preparations such as Petromalt or Laxatone once a week when not shedding and daily during their molt. Finally, daily exercise is another important factor in the prevention of hairballs.

continued





Be sure to work with a veterinarian trained in the care of rabbits

Incontinence

A rabbit with a urinary infection or a disabled older rabbit may not be able to project urine away from the body. The result may be saturated fur around the hindquarters. For milder cases, shave the areas that get wet so the skin can dry (remember, rabbit fur takes a long time to dry), rinse the affected areas daily, and follow up with a dusting of baby powder or corn starch. For more infirm cases, disposable baby diapers-turned backwards so the tabs are up-do wonders for keeping the moisture away from the skin. (Huggies Step 2 work well for an 8 pound rabbit.)

Surgeries

Make sure your rabbit is in good health prior to elective surgeries. Food and water should not be removed from a rabbit the evening before surgery! Any change in diet can upset a rabbit's sensitive digestive tract and cause problems in post-operative recovery. One of the reasons some veterinarians recommend removing animals' food before surgery is the possibility that they may vomit. Rabbits cannot throw up, thus this is not a concern. Additionally, some veterinarians are concerned about spaying rabbits with a full cecum. Unfortunately, the cecum would take 3-4 days of fasting to empty out, and by that time, the rabbit would be dead. So please, do not fast your rabbit before surgery! After surgery, make sure the rabbit's cage is clean, and check her incision site daily for swelling or discharge. Do everything you can to get your rabbit to eat again as soon as possible after returning home. To coax him to eat again, you may have to offer a variety of treats, including his regular pellets and hay. If your rabbit has not eaten for 48 hours after surgery, consult your veterinarian.

Bacterial Infections

The first indication of an infection may be a runny nose or eye, sometimes a high temperature, sometimes a rattling sound from the lungs or (rarely) a coughing sound. It is important to see your veterinarian as soon as the first symptoms of any infection appear, as they are more easily cured when caught in the early stages. The bacteria you may hear the most about is called Pasteurella. This used to be a major problem, but with the newer antibiotics, this bacteria can often be eliminated. And, if not totally eliminated, it can be controlled with the use of long term antibiotics. Most of the symptoms described are quite common for many types of bacteria, so it is important to have your veterinarian do a culture to determine exactly what is being treated.

Digestive Problems

The following symptoms require that you see your veterinarian immediately. Diarrhea — as in human children, diarrhea in rabbits can be fatal. Rabbits have various kinds of diarrhea, if it's runny, messy and smelly it's easy to identify. A more subtle form of diarrhea (which does not require the urgency of runny diarrhea) is when the droppings appear to be normal, but "squash" when you touch or sweep them up. You may also see "clumpy" diarrhea. This will be the consistency of silly putty, with normal round droppings mixed in. Diarrhea usually requires antibiotics from your veterinarian. Other signs to watch for are loud tummy growling, small and/or misshapen droppings or no droppings at all. See your veterinarian if any of these symptoms appear. (Veterinarians often misdiagnose this problem as being a hairball.) §



Sacramento Area Veterinarians

The Sacramento House Rabbit Society makes NO CLAIMS regarding these recommendations. Our policy is to list only those veterinarians recommended by House Rabbit Society members.

Be sure to check out any vet before placing your rabbit's life in their hands! Ask them questions. Make sure you're comfortable with the vet. Don't assume that because one veterinarian at a pet hospital is experienced with rabbits,

all are. A recommended veterinarian may no longer be at the location listed in this list, so be sure before you visit the pet hospital. If you call for an appointment with one of these vets, and you are told by the receptionist that they are "extremely busy" and are offered an appointment with one of their associates, insist on seeing the vet you asked for. When calling a vet listed by the HRS, please tell the vet that you got their name from the House Rabbit Society. §

Sacramento Area

Abel Pet Clinic	9098 Laguna Main St. #1 Elk Grove, CA 95758	Dr. Kelly Byam	(916) 684-6854	
All About Pets	6104 San Juan Ave., Ste. 2 Citrus Heights, CA 95610	Dr. Linda Zucca	(916) 722-0400	
Atlantic Street Veterinary Hospital/ Pet Emergency Center	1100 Atlantic Street Roseville, CA 95678	Dr. Stacey Gillis	(916) 783-4655	Emergency/after hours clinic
Banfield Folsom (PetSmart)	2705 East Bidwell Street Folsom, CA 95693	Dr. Ken Pawlowski	(916) 817-2538	
Bird & Pet Clinic of Roseville	3985 Foothills Blvd. Roseville, CA 95747	Drs. Vickie Joseph, Gary Forney, Corrine Popke	(916) 773-6049	
Bradshaw Veterinary Clinic	9609 Bradshaw Rd. Elk Grove, CA 95624	Dr. Anne Gray	(916) 685-2494	
Cordova Veterinary Hospital	2890 La Loma Dr. Rancho Cordova, CA 95670	Dr. Melissa Gates	(916) 363-9443	
Elk Grove Veterinary Hospital	8640 Elk Grove Blvd. Elk Grove, CA 95624	Drs. Becky Van Riper, Karyn McCulloch	(916) 685-9589	
Hazel Ridge Veterinary Clinic, Inc.	4347 Hazel Ave. Fair Oaks, CA 95628	Dr. Marsha M. Birdsall	(916) 965-8200	
Madison Avenue Veterinary Clinic	8520 Madison Ave. Fair Oaks, CA 95628	Dr. Marianne Brick	(916) 961-1541	
Mobile Vet Connection	7438 Cardwell Ave. Orangevale, CA 95662	Dr. Jyl Rubin	(916) 989-0738	
Petcare Veterinary Clinic	1014 Douglas Blvd. Roseville, CA 95678	Drs. Sandra McRoberts, Laura Rensink	(916) 791-9599	Low-cost spay and neuter services
Rancho Cordova Animal Medical Center	3342 Mather Field Rd. Rancho Cordova, CA 95670	Dr. Charlotte Tomich	(916) 362-1863	

Outlying Areas

Acorn Veterinary Clinic	1340 E. Covell Blvd., #101 Davis, CA 95616	Drs. Sally Borges, Joy Jackman, Kris Codino	(530) 753-7580	
Adobe Pet Hospital	1543 First St. Livermore, CA 94550	Drs. Sandy Dressler-Block, Michelle Kapty	(925) 449-4228	
Airport Pet Clinic	2995 Alhambra Dr. Cameron Park, CA 95682	Dr. William Gallant	(503) 677-7387	
Animal Medical Clinic	3449 Highway 32 Chico, CA 95973	Dr. Barry C. Dohner	(530) 343-1234	
Bowman Veterinarian Hospital	100 Old Auburn Rd. Auburn, CA 95603	(530) 823-6306	Dr. Nicki Kominek	
Loomis Basin Veterinary Clinic	3901 Sierra College Blvd. Loomis, CA 95650	Drs. Christine Holden, Julia Larson	(916) 652-5816	



Reading Your Rabbit

by Amy Shapiro

Rabbits talk to each other and to humans using a wide variety of body positions and facial expressions, and a few vocalizations. Here is a basic vocabulary of rabbit language to help you start a conversation with your companion.

Ears forward. (TV antenna position) “Something has caught my attention.”

Ears back. a) “I don’t like what you’re doing, or what I think you’re about to do.” b) “I’m giving my radar a rest. Wake me for supper.” Ears-back position shows the importance of context and of reading the whole rabbit. If your rabbit puts her ears back, tail up, and growls and lunges when you try to pet her, the message is entirely different from that of a rabbit who is sitting in a favorite corner at midday, ears at rest, front legs tucked (sometimes called **meatloaf position**), eyes at half-mast.

One ear back, one ear forward or to the side. “Something is going on but it doesn’t yet merit my full attention.”

The nose-nudge. a) You reach for your rabbit and he thrusts his nose forward, chin flat on the ground: “Pet me. Now.” b) You’re standing around, minding your own business. Your rabbit hops up and nudges your shin with his nose: “You’re in my path. Make way, buddy.”

Tooth-grinding. You and your rabbit are sitting together on the floor, listening to a ball game on the radio. you hear a strange noise and notice that she seems to be chewing something – like rocks, maybe, from the sound of it: “I’m very happy. If I were a cat I’d be purring.” (Not to be confused with the rarer **tooth-chattering**, which is a sign of pain.)

Nipping. a) “You’re my friend, and I groom all my friends very thoroughly.” b) “Quit trying to put that medicine in my eyes.” c) “I’m a macho male bunny. If you don’t have me neutered I’ll be running the show around here from now on.” d.) “I’m in the mood for lust.”

Licking. “I trust you.”

Lunging. Her ears are back, her chin is thrust forward and up, her tail is up: “Back off.”

Circling. As you attempt to walk across the room, your rabbit runs in circles around you: “Let’s play, Let’s court. I feel frisky.”

Dancing. Your rabbit dashes half-way across the room and makes a 180-degree turn in midair: “Yippee!”

Flopping. Your rabbit, who has been sitting quietly, or grooming herself, suddenly falls over on her side, exposing her belly. you think she’s having a heart attack: “I’m like totally relaxed. Life is wonderful, and so am I.”

Mounting. Putting her front paws on a toy or another rabbit or your foot, your rabbit makes thrusting movements with her hips. a. “This is just a reminder that I’m top bunny around here.” b. “I’m in heat.” c. “I’m feeling feisty.”

REM sleep. His eyelids twitch. His ears twitch. His whiskers vibrate. His head droops, then comes up suddenly. His teeth grind. He starts to fall on his side, then rights himself, then relaxes again: “I’m in another galaxy, dreaming of giant groves of parsley and banana.”

Chinning. She hops from place to place, rubbing her chin against table legs, human legs, bookcases, her litterbox: “This is my home. I’m leaving a scented calling card to let everyone know that I live here.”

Tail up. Your teenage bunny starts munching on your new stereo speaker, even though you’ve just given her fresh branches from her favorite fruit tree. You scold her with a loud NO! She looks at you, then scampers off, tail high in the air or switching rapidly from side to side: “Oh yeah? Well, same to you and many more.”

Growling. “Leave me alone. I don’t trust you. If you keep pushing, I’ll bite you.”

Honking. “I’m excited.”

Screaming. “I’m in excruciating pain. I’m panicked and terrified.”

These are just a few elements of rabbit language. Your own rabbit’s personal dialect can best be learned through patient observation. Spend time on the floor with him. See the world from his point of view. Pay attention to your own body language and his responses to it. The better you know his normal actions and positions, the more quickly you will note any changes that may be the first sign of illness. §



Training Your Rabbit

by Nancy LaRoche

Basics of Rabbit Behavior

Rabbit behavior is usually motivated by one of three things:

- their natural need and inclination to chew and dig;
- their need to communicate in non-verbal ways;
- the social structure as seen by rabbits, in which all members of the family relate to them by way of a “pecking order.”

Preparation

Rabbits should have a home of their own within the family home, large enough for a litter box, food dishes, toys, and them. They should be able to stretch full-length in all directions. Ideally, a shelf is provided to give opportunity for vertical jumps. Rabbits can be kept in such a home full time except for times of supervised outdoor romps (within a restricted area or single room) and the 30 minutes of training they should have daily. As they become well-trained within this restricted area, you can gradually increase their boundaries and their free time.

Never attempt to use training alone to keep a rabbit from household hazards. Toxic house plants and electrical wires should be impossible for a rabbit to reach. Counting on training or “the way he’s always behaved” with respect to such things is asking for an accident that could leave your rabbit injured or dead.

Chewing and Digging

During the training time, do nothing but concentrate on the rabbit. Open the door to her home and let her (or them) come out when she chooses. You may offer toys or treats from your hand, but don’t interfere with her if she wants to explore. Watch her carefully throughout the time she is out of her cage. If she starts to chew on something you don’t want chewed, immediately offer her as many other things that are okay to chew on as you can. Block whatever she was chewing on so it ceases to be a temptation (block it well, so you aren’t simply challenging her to break through).

If possible, provide something with a similar (or better) taste and texture to what is being chewed. For example, a piece of untreated, unfinished baseboard instead of the real baseboard; or a piece of scrap carpet instead of the real carpet (as long as the rabbit isn’t ingesting the pieces she pulls out); or a piece of apple branch instead of chair legs.

The same thing applies to digging. If the rabbit loves to dig in the carpet, build a small “corner” with carpeting on the bottom and give this to her to distract her. A cardboard box filled with shredded newspaper can be a good distractor as well.

Age is a factor in these behaviors. Like puppies, young rabbits have more energy, more of a desire to explore and chew, and a shorter attention span than older bunnies. Be patient with your youngster.

Communicating Without Words

Rabbits are excellent non-verbal communicators. One example of such communication is struggling when he is being picked up. This is simply saying “I don’t like being picked up! PLEASE put me down! I don’t feel safe when you take control of my body this way!” There are a few instances where it is appropriate for you to take charge of your rabbit. If his teeth must be examined or clipped because of malocclusion, it is necessary to hold him against his will.

However, if you want a rabbit who enjoys jumping on your lap and being stroked, it is better to teach him to trust you by not grabbing or holding him against his will when he comes to you. Use treats, nose-to-nose-touching, chin-rubbing (your chin on the rabbit’s face), rubbing around the ears — whatever he enjoys — to encourage his pleasure in being with you. And if he happens not to enjoy such activities, so be it. Respect and enjoy him for who he is. After all, you want the same for yourself.

A rabbit who enjoys sitting on your lap and being stroked may nip you sharply if you get distracted enough to stop stroking her. She isn’t trying to hurt you, just reminding you that she expects you to get back to the job at hand. When a rabbit nips in an effort to communicate appropriately (such as in this case), she probably doesn’t realize how painful it is nor how severe the resulting bruise may be. SCREECH one high, loud, sudden, and short screech to let the rabbit know that she really hurt you. The squeal should be loud, sudden, and high enough to startle her slightly. The next time she nips, you will be surprised at how much gentler it will be. Continue to squeal when nipped, however, until the nip is gentle enough to cause no pain or bruising.

continued





Rabbits are curious by nature and need to learn through gentle but firm training

Who's the Boss?

Your goal is to convince your rabbit that you are “top-rabbit.” This is not the same thing as forcing your will on him in a manner that ignores his needs and desires. Rather, it is an important part of establishing a relationship that will meet his needs as well as yours (he will be quite content accepting you as top-rabbit and himself as subordinate to you, once he sees you as naturally dominant). It even makes it possible for you to carry out your full function as his caretaker.

If your rabbit jumps onto the couch where you are sitting and nips you deliberately, he is probably trying to take the couch for his own. (This is inappropriate nipping.) Not only should you screech, but you should firmly (though gently), return him to the floor with a sharp “No!” If he jumps back up and doesn't nip you, he's learned that he can share the couch, but not drive you off. If he jumps back up and nips again, you repeat the screech, the “No!” and the return to the floor. If he comes back a third time with a nip, it is time for him to “go to his room” (i.e., he needs to be herded back to his cage for a two-minute time-out). If he throws a temper tantrum in the cage, shaking the “bars” and flinging himself around, ignore him. After he's quiet again, he can come out. If he continues to try to force you from your seat, however, he

may need to stay in his cage until the next time he would normally be allowed out. This same general method applies whenever a rabbit attempts to dominate you.

Summary

Training your rabbit requires commitment of time, effort, and thought. It isn't just teaching the word “No!” (which will only teach the rabbit to wait until you aren't looking). It's learning to understand your rabbit's likes and dislikes, working to provide things he really enjoys, thinking up new possibilities when old toys become boring, and making the effort to switch toys regularly to maintain interest.

Enjoy your rabbits to the fullest! Train them well and carefully, love them with all your heart, appreciate them for who and what they are, and you will experience the great pleasure of sharing your lives with each other in harmony. §



Litter-training Your Rabbit

By nature, rabbits choose one or a few places (usually corners) to deposit their urine and most of their pills. Urine-training involves little more than putting a litterbox where the rabbit chooses to go. Pill training requires only that you give them a place they know will not be invaded by others. Here are some suggestions to help you to train your rabbit to use the litterbox.

Age

Older rabbits are easier to train than younger rabbits, especially babies. A rabbit's attention span and knack for learning increases as he grows up. If you have a baby, stick with it! If you are deciding whether to litter train your older rabbit, go for it!

Spaying/Neutering

When rabbits reach the age of 4-6 months, their hormones become active and they usually begin marking their territory. By spaying or neutering your rabbit, he will be much more likely to use his litterbox (as well as be much healthier and happier).

Types of Litter

House Rabbit Society recommends organic litters made from alfalfa, oat, citrus or paper. (Some brands to look for: Care Fresh, Citrafresh, Yesterday's News, Cat Country, Critter Country) A wonderful and inexpensive litter is wood stove pellets, which can be purchased at home improvement stores. Hay can also be used as litter, but needs to be changed daily as your rabbit will be eating it as well.

Stay away from litters made from softwoods, like pine or cedar shavings or chips, as these products are thought to cause liver damage in rabbits who use them. Also avoid clay or clumping cat litters.

Cleaning and Disposal

Clean litterboxes often, to encourage your rabbit to use them. Use diluted white vinegar to rinse boxes out. Accidents outside of the cage can be cleaned up with white vinegar or club soda. If the urine has already dried, you can try products like "Nature's Miracle" to remove the stain and odor. To dispose of organic litters, they can be used as mulch, or can be composted. Rabbit pills can be directly applied to plants as fertilizer.

Pills vs. Urine

All rabbits will drop pills around their cages to mark it as their own. This is not failure to be litter-trained. It is very important for your rabbit to identify the cage as her property so that when she leaves the cage for the bigger world

of your house, she will distinguish the family's area from her own and avoid marking it. To encourage this, make the rabbit the king of his cage. Try not to force him in or out of it — coax him. Do not do things to his cage that he doesn't like, or things to him that he doesn't like while he's in the cage.

Running Space

Even if your goal is to let your rabbit have full run of the house, you must start small. Start with a cage and a small running space, and when your rabbit is sufficiently well-trained in that space, gradually give her more space. But do so gradually! If you overwhelm her with too much freedom before she's ready, she will forget where her box is and will lose her good habits.

The Method

Start with a box in the cage, and one or more boxes in the rabbit's running space. If she urinates in a corner of the cage not containing the box, move the box to that corner until she gets it right. Don't be concerned if your bunny curls up in his litterbox—this is natural. Once she's using the box in the cage, open her door and allow her into her running space. Watch her go in and out on her own. If she heads to a corner where there's no box, or lifts up her tail in the characteristic fashion, cry "no" in a single, sharp burst of sound. Gently herd her back to her cage and her litterbox, or into one of the boxes in her room. Be careful, however. You don't want to make the cage or the litterbox seem like punishment. A handful of hay in the box makes it a more welcoming place. After she first uses the box, praise her and give her her favorite treat. Once she uses the box in her room a couple of times, you're well on your way, as her good habits will be forming. As she gets better trained in her first room, you can increase her space. Don't hurry this process. If the area becomes very big, or includes a second floor, be sure to include more litterboxes, so as not to confuse her. Remember, as she becomes more confident and uses fewer boxes, you can start to remove some of her early, "training" boxes. Get your rabbit into a daily routine and try not to vary it. Rabbits are very habitual and once a routine is established, they usually prefer to stick with it.

Compromise

If your rabbit continually urinates in a spot where there is no litterbox, put his box where he will use it, even if it means rearranging his cage or moving a table in the living room. It is much easier to oblige him than to try to work against a determined bunny! §



Heat Danger

by Kirsten Macintyre

It's that time of year again — time for air conditioners, swimsuits, and sunscreen. For our rabbit companions, though, this isn't a time of rest and relaxation. Your rabbit is depending on you to help keep him cool and comfortable during the hottest time of the year. His life could depend on it.

Rabbits and Heat: A Little Biological Background

Rabbits, like dogs, don't sweat. They lower their body temperature in two ways: they pant, but even more importantly, they use their ears to dissipate heat. If you look at your bunny's ears in the light, you'll be able to see a number of large blood vessels. When it's warm, they'll become large and easily detectable. That's because the blood goes to the ears, where it's closest to the skin's surface. The surrounding air then cools the blood down before it passes back into the rest of the body. A rabbit's normal body temperature is about 102 degrees — still much warmer than the air on a hot day — so the “ears as air conditioners” system works perfectly for them.

Incidentally, this is why rabbits from warm climates, such as jack rabbits, have large ears, while rabbits from cold climates, such as Netherland Dwarfs, have small ears.

If your bunny has hot ears, don't panic. This sign in and of itself is not a bad thing; it just means the “air conditioning” is working. Unless you see other signs of overheating (read on!), there is nothing to worry about.

Precautions and Prevention

Even if your bunny lives indoor all the time, and you have the air conditioner running constantly in the summertime, it's still important to monitor your bunny's behavior and take precautions that he doesn't overheat. Remember that you're much taller than he is, and the room's temperature at his level may be higher or lower by a few degrees than what you can feel. Also remember that he's wearing a fur coat. If he's in a cage, make sure it's away from the sunlight. Even if he can move out of the direct path of the rays, remember that the sun will quickly heat up a metal cage and your bunny's drinking water. After those basic precautions have been taken, consider some of the following solutions, which might suit your needs and make bunny more comfortable:

- The most obvious solution is to get a water bottle — either an old plastic milk jug, or perhaps a bottle of drinking water — and freeze it. You can put the solid bottle directly into the cage with the rabbit. Some bunnies will curl up directly next to the frozen bottle and sleep next to it as it melts. Other rabbits won't actually go near the frozen bottle, but will still reap the benefits as the ice melts and cools off the surrounding air.
- It may help to set up a fan so it blows over (but not directly or continuously on) your rabbit's cage. Some people drape a wet towel over the top of the cage and let the fan blow onto that to encourage quicker evaporation.
- Put a large piece of ceramic or tile into the cage; make sure it's big enough for the bunny to stretch out on. Ceramic and tile are poor conductors of heat and will stay cool and comfortable even when the surrounding air is heating up.
- Remember to brush your bunny regularly — preferably at night or early in the morning, when he won't mind being held against your warm body so much. Now, more than ever, it's important to get all that loose fur out of his coat. He doesn't need the extra insulation!
- If you have a long-haired rabbit, you might consider using blunt-nosed scissors to trim his fur back a bit. Comfort is more important than beauty this time of year.
- Some people find that their rabbits like to be misted with a spray bottle, especially around the ears. Be careful with this technique, though — some bunnies may hate this!
- Try offering a salt block. Not all rabbits care for them, but if he'll lick it, it will help him retain water.
- Keep giving your bunny fresh vegetables. Rinse them in the sink before offering them, and don't bother to shake them dry. The extra water will do him good.

Warning Signs, and What to Do in Case of Emergency

You may notice that your rabbit will do certain things to make himself more comfortable — he may lie down in the path of the floor fan, for instance, or drink more water than he usually does. If he isn't making any effort to stay cool, though, you may have a problem on your hands.



Summer laziness is normal, but true lethargy is the first sign of a bunny in trouble. Other signs of heat exhaustion can include:

- Lying on side.
- Rapid, shallow breathing (the bunny's sides heave with the increased effort).
- Wetness around the nose and mouth/drooling.
- Slight bleeding from the nose (not always present).
- Slight nasal discharge and sneezing on overly hot days.

Pregnant females, overweight buns of both sexes, and small babies surrounded by too much bedding are particularly susceptible to heat exhaustion. In the latter stages of heat prostration, the blood vessels in the ears will enlarge and the mouth may turn blue. At this stage, the condition is usually fatal. If you suspect that your bunny is truly uncomfortable, dampen his ears. You can hold an ice pack to his head or wrap his ears with a cool, wet washcloth. If he still doesn't respond, get him to the vet clinic right away! Do not wait any longer. A truly overheated rabbit needs professional medical care, possibly including

fluid injections. Do NOT try to submerge your rabbit in water — this will likely send him into shock and could easily kill him.

Finally, there is one other health concern that crops up during warm weather. This is also the primary season for fly strike — a very serious and potentially fatal condition in bunnies.

Fly strike occurs when a fly lays eggs on a rabbit's skin. Most commonly, this happens in an open wound, but it can also happen to bunnies whose fur has become matted or caked with urine or feces (moisture, warmth, and odor all attract flies). All it takes is just one insect in the house.

At particular risk for fly strike are older rabbits, disabled rabbits, or overweight rabbits who are unable to clean themselves. Also keep a careful eye out if your bunny has a temporary case of loose stools. Check your rabbit to make sure he's keeping clean and healthy. It's a smart thing to do anyway, but this time of year, it could make the difference between life and death. §



Pasha and Vi enjoy the cooling benefits of a frozen water bottle.

Obesity

by Craig Dinger, DVM

Many people assume that a chubby rabbit is a well-fed rabbit, and a well-fed rabbit is a healthy rabbit. Actually, this is not the case; obesity is a major factor in many diseases and other health problems of rabbits. If you want your rabbit to live a long life, free of medical problems and emergency trips to the vet, you should monitor his weight and take steps to slim him down if he's already on the hefty side.

How do you know if your rabbit is obese? As a general guideline, you should be able to easily feel your rabbit's ribs when gently rubbing your fingers back and forth over the rib cage (but your rabbit should never be so thin that you can easily see the ribs). If you feel a soft spongy layer between the skin and ribs, your rabbit may be too fat. Look for extra flaps of skin around the hind end, which is another sign of obesity. For females, look at the dewlap (the roll of skin under the chin). It should not be so large as to interfere with eating or drinking.

If you are in doubt about your rabbit's weight, please consult with your veterinarian. Obesity places additional stress on the rabbit's body. The extra body weight places excessive pressure on the feet (especially the hind feet). This increased pressure can negatively affect blood supply to the foot, resulting in pressure necrosis (tissue that dies due to poor blood circulation) and secondary bacterial infection of the skin called pododermatitis or "sore hocks." Pododermatitis ulcerations can range from superficial raw spots to wounds that are deep enough to involve the bone. Other factors can add to the risk of pododermatitis, including foot trauma from sharp surfaces (such as exposed wire cage bottoms), moist or dirty surfaces inside the cage, and excessive stomping of the feet. An obese rabbit may also be unable to turn his head far enough to clean himself, thus allowing urine and feces to collect on the feet. Urine is caustic and can result in burns called "urine scald". These are spots where the skin is red and the fur has rubbed off. The surrounding fur may be stained yellow, and there may be a strong odor of urine.

Obese rabbits may also have difficulty breathing. Although rabbits are athletic animals, they have relatively small chest cavities. Added fat in the abdomen puts pressure on the diaphragm, making it difficult for the animal to expand the lungs and breathe. The excess fat also provides excessive insulation, making it difficult for the animal to avoid overheating in warm weather.

Obesity may prevent a rabbit from consuming cecotropes, or "night droppings," that provide important nutrients and vitamins. The rabbit digestive system eliminates fiber rapidly, digesting only the non-fiber portion of the diet. Hard feces produced from fiber are excreted during the first four hours after feeding. Meanwhile, the non-fiber portion of the diet is moved into the cecum where it is fermented by bacteria. This fermentation produces amino acids, volatile fatty acids and vitamins necessary for good rabbit health. This fermented product becomes the cecotropes. The cecotropes are soft, sticky and covered with mucous. They are excreted selectively and consumed directly from the anus during the four- to eight-hour period following the rabbit's meal. Consumption of cecotropes (called "coprotrophy") makes the products of fermentation available to the animal. If the rabbit cannot consume the cecotrophs, he may experience nutritional deficiencies.

Lastly, obesity predisposes the rabbit to hepatic lipodosis, or fatty liver. This can cause serious problems if a rabbit suddenly stops eating for any reason, or if the owner of an obese rabbit tries to slim him down too quickly.

In obese rabbits, anorexia (a decreased food intake) will result in the large amounts of body fat being mobilized and sent to the liver for an energy source. However, in obese rabbits, the liver is already infiltrated with fat, and the additional fat accumulates faster than it can be converted into useable energy. This can result in damage to the liver. Wool block, toxins, enteritis, organ failure, oral pain, or even stress may trigger anorexia.

Obesity Prevention

Preventing obesity and its related disorders is easier than correcting obesity, so let's begin with prevention. Just as with humans, exercise plays a major role in preventing obesity. Many caged rabbits suffer from a lack of exercise; caregivers need to make certain that their rabbits have safe housing that is large enough for the rabbit to move around in. They also need to make certain that the rabbits have supervised time outside of the enclosure for play and exercise. If you have more than one rabbit and the rabbits are not spayed or neutered and bonded, it may be advisable to let them exercise separately to avoid potential fighting.



Diet is also an extremely important aspect of rabbit health and prevention of obesity. Rabbit pellets should have crude fiber content greater than 17 percent. Below are feeding recommendations for house rabbits:

- 1/8-1/4 cup alfalfa or timothy pellets per 5 lbs optimum body weight daily. (Do not feed free choice pellets except to baby bunnies, pregnant or lactating does. Most rabbits will eat more than they need to, if given the opportunity.)
- Timothy hay or other grass hay, fed free choice. Hay is high in fiber and low in calories. Alfalfa hay can be offered as a limited treat due to calories and high calcium content.
- An iodized salt lick is recommended (although not all rabbits like them). The iodine counteracts the tendency of cabbage, kale, mustard greens and similar food to produce goiter, an enlargement of the thyroid gland.
- Small amounts of leafy greens (broccoli, kale, etc.)
- Small pieces of carrots, apples, etc.
- Fresh water should be also available at all times. Water bottles are generally better than bowls for preventing contamination and waste (some rabbits tend to defecate or sit in bowls).
- Do not feed seeds, nuts, candy, cookies or other similar dessert-type treats. Processed foods for humans (and often ones made for animals as well) are both high in calories and hard for rabbit digestive systems to handle.

Healthy Weight Loss

So what do you do if your rabbit is already too chubby? Because of the risk of hepatic lipidosis, obese rabbits need to lose weight gradually. The best method of weight loss is a combination of exercise and diet management. Increase the rabbit's exercise and play time to help burn up extra calories while slowly decreasing calorie intake by reducing the amount of feed per day. Pay particular attention to the amount of pellets offered and continue to offer unlimited amounts of hay.

A healthy rabbit is a happy rabbit...proper weight management will both extend the life of your pet and reduce the risk of medical problems later on. §



Christopher is an overweight bunny, at risk for a variety of health issues. Increasing his exercise and slowly decreasing his pellet intake will get him to a healthier weight.

Safe Grooming Techniques

byCarolynn Harvey, DVM

Rabbits can act as if they're hardy creatures, but they are, in fact, extremely delicate—from their skin to their spines to their external systems. Care must be taken to maintain their good health. The following basics are necessary to know in order to groom rabbits safely and to help keep them healthy. For information specifically geared towards the caring for long-haired rabbits, see the reprint of the *House Rabbit Journal* article, "The Well-Groomed Rabbit."

Shedding

Rabbits shed every 3 months. Every alternate time they'll have a light shedding that may not be very noticeable. Next they'll have a heavy shedding that you will not be able to escape.

Rabbits are fastidious groomers. They insist on being clean & tidy and will lick themselves like cats, and like cats, they can get hairballs if they ingest too much hair. Unlike cats however, rabbits cannot vomit. If hairballs are allowed to form they can become gigantic masses of tangled hair

and food and will block the stomach exit, causing the rabbit to starve to death while his stomach appears to be very fat.

Rabbits need to be brushed at least weekly. In addition to removing any loose hair, this weekly brushing session helps prepare them for the multiple daily brushings that they must undergo when their heavy shedding begins. Rabbits will shed in different ways. Some rabbits will take a couple of weeks or more to lose their old coat of fur. Other rabbits will be ready to get rid of their old coats all in one day and these rabbits are the ones that cannot be neglected once they start shedding. You can often remove a very large percentage of hair by just pulling it out with your hand. But, however you remove it, remove it as soon as possible or your rabbit will do it during grooming.

Bald spots on rabbits are quite common when they are shedding. I have one Angora rabbit for instance, that gets totally naked except for her face and feet. But, short haired rabbits can do the same thing. If these bald spots occur from shedding, they will begin to grow back within a week or two.



Babette gives herself a bath after a grooming session. During shedding season, outdoor brushing is a good way to go!



Long Haired Rabbits

These types of rabbits are truly wonderful to look at, but require a lot more attention than their short haired cousins. We recommend that you use your scissors and keep their hair trimmed to one inch or less, otherwise you may be fighting hairballs most of the time.

Expert Help: If you are not comfortable with the above you can have someone, maybe your veterinarian, show you how to do all of the above tasks.

Fleas and Mites

Safe treatments to prevent and kill fleas on rabbits include **Advantage** (imidocloprid), **Program** (lufenuron) and **Revolution** (selamectin). The latter is preferred, as it is also effective against various types of mites that cause symptoms of mange, ear canker, and “dandruff” (which is often caused by fur mites in the genus *Cheyletiella*). These products are available from your rabbit-savvy veterinarian, who can explain dosage and treatment regimens to you at the time of prescription.

A flea comb is a non-toxic device that takes more patience, but is both physically and psychologically rewarding. Most rabbits learn to love the attention of being flea combed, and it can be used as a supplement to your main flea-control program.

The following products should NOT be used on rabbits:

- Frontline (fipronil) has been linked to neurological damage and death in rabbits, although this product is apparently safe for dogs and cats. **The manufacturer (Merial) has placed a warning on the Frontline label stating that Frontline should never be used on rabbits.**
- Flea powders, even those considered safe for cats and kittens or advertised as “rabbit safe”, are not recommended for use on rabbits.
- Flea shampoos, even those considered safe for cats and kittens or advertised as “rabbit safe”, are not recommended for use on rabbits. Bathing of rabbits, in general, is strongly discouraged because the stress of the bath itself can cause serious health problems, and has in some cases been linked to the death of the rabbit. Flea baths or dips are **not** recommended for this reason.

- For environmental flea control, sprays and “bombs” are not recommended, as they may leave harmful residue that the rabbit can ingest. Safer alternatives include borax and diatomaceous earth, worked into the carpet where fleas leave their eggs.

Baths

Although a rare bunny may grow up swimming in the family pool and going on camping trips where she paddles around in the lake, the vast majority of rabbits, like their ancestors, do not relish getting wet. Even an occasional bath is quite stressful to the average rabbit, and is not recommended.

Never – unless your veterinarian advises it to bring down a fever – should you give a sick rabbit a bath. Because seemingly healthy rabbits can have undiagnosed problems, it’s best not to subject them to the stress of a bath. If your rabbit is very badly infested with fleas, there’s a good chance that he is already compromised and may go into shock when bathed. There are many safe alternatives to flea control (see these under “Fleas,” above). Also, a thoroughly wet rabbit takes a very long time to dry, so spot cleaning the dirty area with an application of baby cornstarch (available at any supermarket in the baby section) (do not use talcum, as it is carcinogenic) and then gently combing out the dirt with a fine flea comb is better than a wet bath.

A wet rabbit can quickly become hypothermic. If your rabbit is wet to the skin for any reason, be sure to thoroughly blow dry the bunny until even the undercoat is dry and fluffy. Normal rabbit body temperature ranges from 101°F – 103°F. Because rabbit skin is very delicate, and rabbits are sensitive to heat, never use a blow dryer on a setting higher than “warm,” and constantly monitor the temperature of the air on the bunny’s skin by placing your hand in its path.

Mats

Rabbit skin is delicate and highly susceptible to cuts, so mats should not be cut off with scissors. Instead, use a mat splitter or mat rake to take the mass apart. Bunny fur usually requires a finer blade than most cats and dogs.

continued



Skin

Scratchy, flaky skin with bald patches is usually a symptom of mites or, more rarely, an allergic reaction to fleas. Products described under “Fleas” will usually clear up such problems. A veterinarian should be consulted for such conditions as open sores, or chronic skin inflammation.

Feet

House rabbits who spend all of their time in homes with carpeting and linoleum periodically need to have their toenails trimmed, in the same way as dogs and cats.

Because of risk of infection, declawing is definitely **not** recommended for rabbits. If excessive digging or scratching is a problem, then a large box of hay or straw, where bunny can pursue these activities, may help.

If the padding (fur) on the feet is worn down, exposing inflamed or callused skin, then soft dry resting pads (rugs) should be provided. Exposed skin that becomes urine burned or broken is very likely to infect. Take extra care that rugs and litterboxes are kept clean and dry.

Ears

Ear wax can be lifted out with a cotton swab, being careful not to push on wax in the canal, or you can try a mild ear cleaner containing Chlorhexadine, such as Nolvasan Otic. For ear mite infestation, apply a topical medication such as Mitox. The veterinarian may also prescribe Ivermectin.

Teeth

Rabbits teeth grow continuously and must be checked to ensure that they are wearing down properly. While you're brushing your rabbit or clipping his nails also look at his teeth to make sure there is not a problem.

See page 11 for further information about tooth issues.

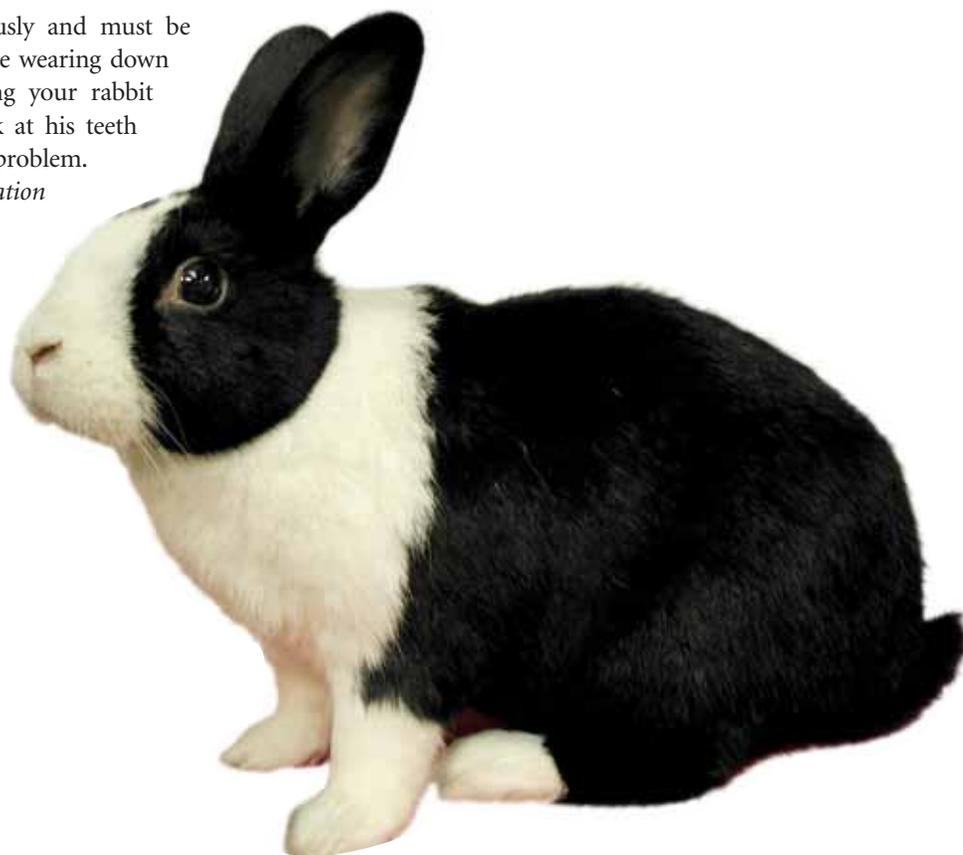
Nails

Rabbits nails can grow to be very long and sharp and will be uncomfortable for the rabbit. If the rabbit has light colored nails they are very easy to trim. You can see the blood inside the nail and you clip just before that point. The dark colored nails are harder to see where they should be clipped but it is still visible.

People are often afraid to clip nails for fear that they will cause the rabbit to bleed. You can purchase a product called Kwik Stop to keep on hand for this problem, but I've found that just holding pressure with a cotton ball works better for me. Your veterinarian will also clip nails for you. They should be checked every 6-8 weeks.

Eyes

Watery eyes or and eye discharge needs to be diagnosed by a vet. In addition to any medications or eye drops, the cheek needs to be kept dry and clean so the area will not become chafed nor the fur peel off. Clean tissues will absorb mild wetness. Ophthalmic saline solution (what people use with their contacts) carefully poured onto the cheek will crystallize the tears so that they can be removed with a clean flea comb. A touch of prescription anesthetic powder on a finger can be applied to the area if there are painful lesions. §



Introducing Rabbits

by Margo Demello

Possible Types of Introductions

- *Boy and girl*: one of the easiest, often fall in love at first sight — but not always.
- *Girl and girl*: sometimes easy, often fighting.
- *Boy and boy*: sometimes easy, sometimes difficult, usually fighting at first, but not at all impossible.
- *Two babies*: extremely easy.
- *Three or more rabbits*: Difficulty varies, depending on sexes, personalities, and whether or not two of the rabbits are already bonded.
- *Baby and adult*: Sometimes difficult, but goes well if adult is very tolerant.
- *Bringing home a rabbit to an existing rabbit*: Much easier if you bring a girl home to a boy than if you bring a rabbit home to a girl.
- *Bringing two rabbits home at the same time*: Quite easy, even if they're same sex. Usually the new space is enough to make them become friends quite on their own.

Possible Scenarios after First Introduction

- *Love at first sight*: If this occurs, you can try them in the space they're going to live in. If it's still good, then they're fine, you have nothing else to do.
- *Tentative friendship*: If this occurs, just watch them when they're together, keep them separate when you're not around, and if no fighting occurs, they'll eventually become friends.
- *Amorous behavior*: If the (neutered) male mounts the female, and the female does not mind, then this is usually a sign that the relationship will go well. If she does mind, and runs, it is still not usually a problem. If she minds, and becomes aggressive towards him, then you must prepare for a lengthier introduction period.
- *One chasing, one running*: If this occurs, just make sure the one running doesn't fight back and doesn't get hurt. If neither of these things occurs, then just watch and wait. If one gets hurt, then separate them and go slower and if one fights back, then you must prepare for a lengthier introduction period.
- *Fighting*: When two new rabbits (or, for that matter, two existing rabbits) fight, then you must prepare for a full introduction period.

How To's: Work with Space

Rabbits are extremely territorial. In wild rabbits, territorial behavior includes depositing marking pellets at the boundaries of the territory, chinning, urinating, and aggressive behavior such as digging, circling, and fighting. Wild males tend to defend larger territories while females concentrate on their nests. In our neutered domestic companions, hormonal causes may be absent, but territorial behavior still exists. Thus, when introducing new rabbits, territory must be considered and used to your advantage. What you are trying to do is eliminate the possibility for there to develop any territorial behavior in the rabbits. So you choose introductory spaces that are as different from your bunny's territory as possible. You are also trying to mimic positive feelings in your rabbits. By creating artificial situations where your bunnies are snuggling, rubbing noses, smelling each others' fur, etc., you are creating positive memories, even if they are also stressful. I call this "coerced closeness." They are positive in the sense that they don't associate the other bun with the stress (of the car ride, for example), they associate the other rabbit with the feelings of security that they receive. If they fight, then they will carry those bad memories around with them, and will remember that they fought together.

- Always introduce rabbits, regardless of sex or age, in neutral space first. (Obviously, if you're bringing home two bunnies together, then any space in your home is neutral space.) Possible neutral spaces might be: a room that your rabbit has never been in, a friend's home or apartment, the seat of a car, on top of the kitchen table, the garage, the bathtub, or a pen in the back yard.
- Try to bring your current rabbit with you to pick up your new rabbit, so that they can share that first car ride together.
- Work with the rabbits for at least twenty minutes per day. Make sure to spend some time with the rabbits in one or more neutral space every day. When you're not actively working with them, they should be apart if they fight when together. If they do not fight, then they can be left alone if you're not working with them, but not when you're not home at all.
- Every day, try using two different situations, one relatively stressful (like a car ride), followed by one relatively normal (the floor of a new room, the top of the bed). That way, you can try to gradually transition





The first meeting should take place in a neutral space with a gate between the rabbits to gauge their initial reaction to each other. Marshmallow and Tracker seem very at ease.

them from strange to normal situations, without them fighting. If you immediately attempt to let them run around on the floor together, without first having taken them for a car ride, they may forget that the space is neutral and fight anyway.

- Use a water bottle (with the nozzle set on “stream”) to break up any fights if they occur. It’s best to spray the instigator before a fight actually occurs (watch for aggressive body language) rather than work on breaking up an existing fight. None of these suggestions will work by themselves, and none will work immediately (usually). Work with your rabbits every day, for at least twenty minutes or so a day, and when

you’re not working with them, keep them in eye contact of each other. Start with extreme scenarios and gradually move to less extreme. Do one extreme and one less extreme every day. The more often you work with them, the quicker the progress. If you want to move at a quicker pace, then you need to arrange a large block of time (like a week’s vacation) in an extremely neutral space (like a friend’s or relative’s house). If one rabbit is elderly or otherwise compromised, then go slowly to minimize the stress. §



9 COMMON RABBIT MYTHS

Myth 1: Rabbits are great, low-maintenance starter pets.

Reality: Although they don't need to be walked like dogs, rabbits are anything but low-maintenance. Their quarters need daily cleaning, and fresh food and water must be offered daily, including a salad of well-washed, dark-green leafy vegetables. Certain rabbit health problems can become chronic and can require regular (and sometimes expensive) veterinary treatment. To complicate the picture, veterinarians skilled in rabbit medicine are often hard to find.

Myth 2: Rabbits only live a year or two, so no long commitment is necessary.

Reality: Well cared-for indoor rabbits can live 7-10 years, and some live into their teens. This is approximately the same life span as some breeds of dogs, and requires the same long-term commitment.

Myth 3: Rabbits do not need veterinary care the way dogs and cats do.

Reality: Although rabbits in the USA do not require annual vaccinations, nevertheless, regular veterinary checkups help to detect small problems before they become big ones. Companion rabbits should be spayed/neutered by veterinarians experienced in rabbit surgery. This not only reduces hormone-driven behaviors such as lunging, mounting, spraying, and boxing, but also protects females from the risk of uterine cancer, the incidence of which can exceed 50% as rabbits grow older.

Myth 4: Rabbits are happiest outdoors in a backyard hutch.

Reality: Rabbits kept outdoors in hutches are often forgotten and neglected once the initial novelty wears off. Far too frequently, they are relegated to a life of "solitary confinement" and are subject to extremes of weather, as well as to diseases spread by fleas, ticks, flies, and mosquitoes all of which can adversely affect their health and their life span. They can die of heart attacks from the very approach of a predator – even if the rabbit is not attacked or bitten. Rabbits are gregarious creatures who enjoy social contact with their human caretakers. The easiest way to provide social stimulation for a companion rabbit is to house him indoors, as a member of the family.

Myth 5: Rabbits are rather dirty, and have a strong odor.

Reality: Rabbits are immaculately clean, and, once they have matured and are spayed/neutered, they go to great lengths not to soil their living quarters. They will readily use a litter-box, and if the box is cleaned or changed daily, there is no offensive odor.

Myth 6: Rabbits love to be picked up and cuddled, and do not scratch or bite.

Reality: Although some rabbits tolerate handling quite well, many do not like to be picked up and carried. If rabbits are mishandled they will learn to nip to protect themselves. If they feel insecure when carried they may scratch to get down. Unspayed/unneutered rabbits often exhibit territorial behavior such as "boxing" or nipping when their territory is "invaded" by the owner.

Myth 7: Rabbits – especially dwarf breeds – do not require much living space.

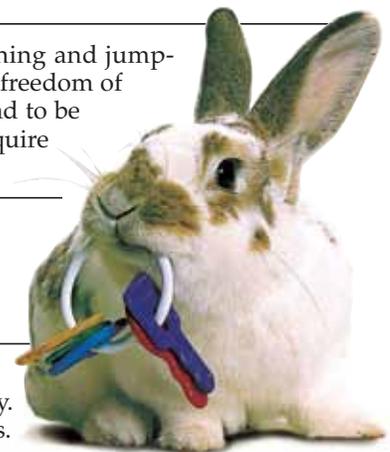
Reality: Rabbits have powerful hind legs designed for running and jumping. They need living space that will permit them ample freedom of movement even when they are confined. Dwarf rabbits tend to be more active and energetic than some larger breeds, and require relatively more space.

Myth 8: Rabbits can be left alone for a day or two when owners travel.

Reality: Rabbits need daily monitoring. Problems that are relatively minor in some species (e.g. a day or two of anorexia) may be life-threatening in rabbits, and may require immediate veterinary attention.

Myth 9: Rabbits do fine with a bowl of rabbit food and some daily carrots.

Reality: The single most important component of a rabbit's diet is grass hay, which should be provided, free-choice, daily. Rabbit pellets should be given only in very limited quantities.



©Mary E. Cotter, 2002

WWW.RABBIT.ORG





Sacramento
House Rabbit Society

Sacramento House Rabbit Society
P.O. Box 19850
Sacramento, CA 95819-0850
www.alllearssac.org