

# rabbit

## care sheet



Rabbits are intelligent, affectionate and social animals that need daily interaction with humans or other rabbits. Spayed or neutered rabbits tend to be healthier, live longer and are better companions.

### facts

average adult size: 12+ inches long  
average life span: up to 10+ years  
with proper care  
diet: herbivore



**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

### diet

The majority of a rabbit's diet should be composed of grass hay (any variety), which is rich in vitamins A & D as well as calcium, protein and other nutrients. Eating hay promotes health and should be available at all times. Avoid the use of alfalfa after a rabbit has reached approximately 7 months of age as it is very high in calcium and protein and more than a rabbit needs. Feeding quality pellets along with hay and other green leafy vegetables is important to add the nutrients not readily available in hay. A well balanced rabbit diet consists of:

- High-quality rabbit food, Timothy hay and limited amounts of fruits and vegetables.
- Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water, changed daily.

Do **not** feed chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

### feeding

Things to remember when feeding your rabbit:

- Fresh food, timothy hay and water should always be available.
- Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.
- Fruits and vegetables should not exceed 10% of their total diet.

- Many house plants are toxic and a rabbit should not eat grass treated with pesticides or any other chemicals.
- It is normal for rabbits to eat cecotropes—soft black feces filled with minerals and nutrients (coprophagy). This practice generally happens early in the morning which is why pet parents rarely notice.

### housing

- Rabbits acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F. Be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- Habitat should be at least four times the size of the rabbit and escape-proof with an area that has a solid surface and plenty of room for exercise and play. It is best to provide the largest habitat possible.
- 1 to 2" of bedding should be placed in the habitat. Proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not recommended.
- Rabbits may be kept in mixed-sex pairs if spayed or neutered, or same-sex pairs if they are raised together. Otherwise, keep rabbits housed separately. Different

types of small animals should **not** be housed together.

### normal behavior and characteristics

- When handling a rabbit, ensure you are fully supporting the body, especially the hind legs. Never pick up a rabbit by its ears or try to hold it on its back.
- Rabbits can be litter box-trained.
- Rabbits chew on objects to maintain all their teeth, which grow continuously. Ensure your rabbit has plenty of chew sticks or mineral chews available.
- Rabbits can chew on apples, willow, aspen branches, pine firewood, untreated fresh pine lumber attached to habitat or a basket with hay inside (let the rabbit chew the basket as well as the hay).
- Not all wood can be given to rabbits. Do not give rabbits apricot or peach fruit tree branches.

### habitat maintenance

- Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents at least once a week with 3% bleach solution. Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the rabbit back into the habitat.
- Remove wet spots daily and

change bedding at least once a week, or more often as necessary.

- Scoop litter pan daily.

### grooming and hygiene

- Rabbits stay clean and rarely need baths, but may be bathed using shampoo designed for rabbits or kittens, if necessary. Frequently clean areas of the ear you can see without going into the ear canal using a cotton ball.
- It is good to brush rabbits regularly to remove hair that is shedding, help prevent hairballs and keep long-haired rabbits from matting. Short-haired rabbits should be brushed once a week and long-haired rabbits should be brushed twice a week.
- Consult your veterinarian if a rabbit's teeth or nails seem too long. Nails should be clipped often so they don't become curled.

### signs of a healthy animal

- Active, alert and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is unlabored
- Walks normally
- Communicates by making soft noises

### red flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Overgrown teeth
- Overgrown nails

*If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.*

### common health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stool caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or other illness.	Consult with your veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Heat Stroke	Emergency condition; can occur if rabbit is left in a hot room. Symptoms include heavy panting, seizures and loss of consciousness.	Can be fatal; consult with your veterinarian immediately.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth.	Visit your veterinarian to have teeth trimmed regularly.
Mites	External parasites that cause rabbits to lose patches of hair.	Consult with your veterinarian for treatment.
Tumors	Abnormal lumps.	Consult with your veterinarian.

## shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- High-quality rabbit food
- Timothy hay
- Treats
- Bedding
- Food bowl/water bottle
- Hideaway place
- Toys
- Hay rack
- Wood and mineral chews
- Litter box and litter
- Indoor playpen
- Brush/nail clippers
- Scoop
- Styptic powder
- Harness and leash
- Book about rabbits

## sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on rabbits and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all small animals are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, Rat Bite Fever and *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your small animal or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Go to [cdc.gov/healthypets](http://cdc.gov/healthypets) and [petco.com/caresheet](http://petco.com/caresheet) for more information about small animals and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to [petco.com](http://petco.com) for more information.

