



**whitehorsevet**  
veterinary hospital of excellence



# THE ESSENTIAL RABBIT GUIDE

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BE A EXPERT OWNER

FIRST STEPS

HOUSING

FEEDING

HANDLING

VACCINATIONS

PARASITES

DENTAL CARE

DESEXING



We would like to congratulate you on the arrival  
of your new rabbit!

Owning a rabbit can be an extremely rewarding experience, but  
it carries with it some responsibility.

We hope this information booklet will help give your new  
"hopping" family member all the health & happiness it deserves



# YOUR RABBIT'S ENVIRONMENT



## Grazing

Rabbits love to graze on fresh grass, so making a 'grazing ark' that can be moved around the garden will allow them unlimited access to nutritious feed. Make sure to keep an eye on them, they are cheeky.

## Shade & Sunlight

Ensure your rabbit has access to both shade & sunlight. Rabbits are sensitive to temperatures below 4 degrees celcius & above 28 degrees celcius.

## Toilet training?

Rabbits are generally clean animals, and can even be trained to use a litter tray!

## Beware of hazards

Beware of hazards both inside the house & outside, including electrical wires, poisonous plants (oleander, dumbcane), and predators (such as foxes).

## Room to move

It is important that your rabbit has room to hop around. If they have a smaller cage, then supervised exercise outside of their cage is highly beneficial!

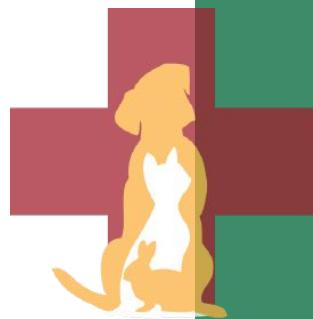
## Social Beings

Rabbits are social creatures & are more than happy being housed with multiple rabbits.



## Indoor or outdoor

Rabbits can be kept as indoor or outdoor pets - or even better, both!





# THE IDEAL RABBIT DIET

Feeding a good diet is crucial for your rabbit to lead a long and healthy life. A bad diet in rabbits can lead to many problems including obesity, dental disease, and life-threatening gut stasis (slowed passage of food through the intestines). Your rabbit's digestive tract is specialised to process a high fibre diet, and often rabbit 'mixes' and pelleted feed does not contain enough fibre.



Pellets - We recommend Oxbow Bunny (available at the clinic) or other high fibre pellets (>20% fibre). A good general rule is to feed a maximum of 25g of high-fibre pellets per kg bodyweight per day.



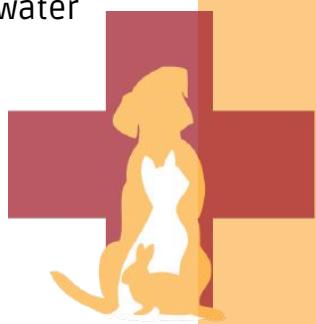
Treats- Many owners like to feed treats to their rabbits. Small pieces of fruit (high fibre fruits such as apple) or vegies such as carrot may be used as a treat. Oxbow also make a great hay based treat which can be purchased from the clinic.



10-20% dark leafy greens and herbs such as bok choy, brussel sprouts, parsley, mint, carrot tops, basil and spinach leaves. A total of around 1 cup of vegies per 1.8kgs body weight per day is recommended.



Unlimited access to fresh water





## GENTLE HANDS = MORE LOVE

When handling your rabbit, it is important that the rabbit feels comfortable and that they are safe. Rabbits have a delicate skeleton, and can easily fracture their hind limbs or spine if not handled correctly.

### When holding your rabbit, remember:

- NEVER pick up your rabbit by their ears.
- ALWAYS support the rabbit's hindquarters to prevent them from kicking out.

## WHY vaccinate?

Calicivirus is a serious disease in rabbits that can cause fever, difficulty breathing, and it is usually fatal.

It can easily be spread from wild rabbits to pet rabbits through biting insects, such as fleas and mosquitoes.

In Australia, fortunately we have a vaccine available to protect pet rabbits against this disease!

At Whitehorse Veterinary Hospital, we follow a vaccination protocol recommended by top rabbit specialists in Australia.

The number of vaccinations your rabbit will need will depend on how old it is when it first visits the vet:

## WHY & WHEN?



### Young rabbits:

vaccinate at 4 weeks, 8 weeks, and 12 weeks of age



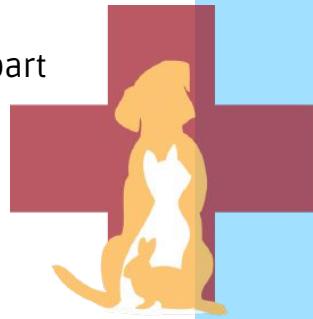
### Unvaccinated rabbits 12 weeks and older:

two vaccinations, 1 month apart



### Adult rabbits:

vaccinate every 6-12 months





## "CREEPY CRAWLIES"

Rabbits are susceptible to several types of external parasites. They are not susceptible to internal parasites. Refer to the list on the right to see what they need protecting against.

There are no products in Australia registered to prevent or treat these parasites in rabbits.

However, many products have been used by many veterinarians with good success.

We recommend the use of Revolution as a monthly spot-on treatment to prevent or treat mites and fleas. Advantage is also effective as a monthly spot-on treatment against fleas, but does not have any effect on mites.

Because rabbits are much smaller than cats or dogs, you will need to talk with one of our vets to determine an appropriate dose of these products for your rabbit.



### Fur mites

(*Cheyletiella parasitovorax*), which cause dry scaly 'dandruff' on the skin



### Ear mites

(*Psoroptes cuniculi*), which cause severe itchiness and pain around the ears



### Fleas

(*Ctenocephalides felis/canis*), which cause generalised itchiness

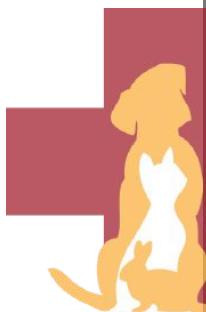


### Heartworm

(*Dirofilaria immitis*)



### Intestinal worms



# "WHAT'S UP DOC?"



Unlike in humans, a rabbit's teeth will grow continuously throughout their life. From 5 weeks of age onwards, your rabbits teeth will grow approximately 2mm per week! The teeth then wear down by rubbing against the other teeth (and when eating fibrous material in the diet) so they stay an even length.

Dental disease is very common in adult rabbits.

There are many reasons why a rabbit can get dental disease, including genetic factors, a poor diet, or an imbalance of vitamins and minerals.

Dental disease is usually a painful condition, and affected rabbits may be reluctant to eat, lose weight, have swellings on their faces, and even have digestion problems.



Providing a good quality, high fibre diet, including unlimited access to grass and grass hay.



Allowing time in unfiltered sunshine, so that the rabbit can make vitamin D to promote healthy bones and teeth.



Having regular vet checks. Your veterinarian can use a cone with a light source to check inside your rabbits mouth, and ensure that there are no painful sharp spurs of teeth or signs of tooth disease.



# REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH!



## PUBERTY

Rabbits reach puberty at 12 weeks of age, so if you have male and female rabbits and do not want them to breed, it is important that you separate them from as young as 10 weeks of age.



## FEMALE RABBITS

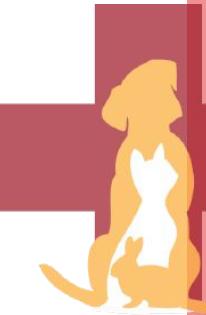
Adult female rabbits who are not desexed have a high incidence (up to 60-80%) of cancer of the uterus ('adenocarcinoma'), and can get other uterine diseases such as pyometra (pus in the uterus) and uterine polyps. There is also evidence to suggest that they are at an increased risk of mammary cancers.

For these reasons, it is our recommendation that female rabbits be spayed (have the uterus and ovaries removed) before 16 weeks of age.



## MALE RABBITS

Male rabbits can develop testicular diseases if left entire, such as cancers or infection, however these are usually rare. Male rabbits can also show behaviours that owners may find undesirable, such as spraying of urine. We recommend that male rabbits be desexed at 16 weeks of age or younger, as they can be prolific breeders!



DESEXING