

Rabbits

Rabbits are very popular house pets. They can be quite intelligent and affectionate. Diet considerations are very important when caring for rabbits. Typical alfalfa-based rabbit pellets are not optimized for adult rabbits, being too low in fiber, and too high in minerals. Problems from such diets include dental disease, digestive “blockages” obesity, and bladder stones. Worse yet, rabbit diets with added fruit, treats, and nuts can cause serious digestive problems. High fiber is accomplished by feeding mainly timothy hay, widely available at many pet outlets. Oxbow Hay make a timothy-based rabbit pellet which is a fine staple diet item.

Rabbits can be “box trained.” Caging should provide adequate space to eat, sleep, and move around. Heavy rabbits on wire are prone to foot problems. We recommend supervised exercise outside, in secure fencing. The optimum enclosure will have a cover for predator protection.

Serious harm to the bunny and damage to your property can occur if your pet runs loose in the house. Dangers include ingesting dog/cat food, carpeting, and electric wires.

No vaccinations are currently given to rabbits. Despite past lack of concern by public health officials, rabies has been documented in pet rabbits (*Rabies in Two Privately Owned Domestic Rabbits J Am Vet Med Assoc 215[12]:1824-1827 Dec 15'99*). This is one more reason to avoid pet rabbit exposure to wildlife.

Common medical problems include respiratory disease, Pasteurellosis, digestive disorders, fur mites, and dental disease. Uterine cancer risks are avoided by hysterectomy. Neutering males can lessen aggression problems.

Regular veterinary checkups are always a good idea, with periodic blood testing. Rabbits are somewhat prone to kidney problems- blood testing can detect early changes. A thorough dental exam, when problems are suspected, can involve sedation, oral scoping, and x-rays. Special tools have been designed for rabbit dental treatment.

Care should be taken when picking up a rabbit in order to prevent back fractures. Young children should not pick up rabbits to avoid injuries to themselves or the rabbit.