



Good Practice Code for the Welfare of

RABBITS



Good Practice Code for the Welfare of Rabbits.

Created to support Section 15 of the
Animal Welfare Act 2006

2023



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Understanding the Animal Welfare Act 2006

Introduction to the Code

This introduction, which is not part of the Code, tells you about the Code and provides advice on owning rabbits. Owning and caring for rabbits can be a source of great enjoyment, but you should be aware that like any pet, rabbit ownership is a major responsibility. Typically, rabbits can live for about 8-12 years, although may sadly die much earlier than this for different reasons such as their genetics and the care they receive. Consequently, you should think carefully about all factors that will affect your ability to care for rabbits longterm and whether rabbits are suitable for you. Would you be able to provide for all of the needs for your rabbits? You will need to consider the size of your property and the financial and time implications of having rabbits as pets. Caring for rabbits can be expensive and you should consider whether, for instance, you would be able to afford the cost of both routine and unexpected veterinary treatment, or the cost of pet health insurance as well as weekly food bills. There is no one “perfect” way to care for all rabbits because all rabbits, and situations, are all different. Under Section 9 of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (the Act) you must take all reasonable steps to ensure that you meet the following needs that your rabbits have, which are set out in the Act as follows:



A. their need for a suitable environment;



B. their need for a suitable diet;



C. their need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns;



D. any need they have to be housed with, or apart from, other animals; and



E. their need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

Living with at least one other rabbit in a compatible pair is essential for a rabbit's wellbeing, therefore we refer to rabbits as a pair, or group, throughout this guidance.

Under the Act you are always responsible for your rabbits' needs. Furthermore, if you are a parent or guardian of a child under the age of 16 years old, you are responsible for any animal that a child cares for. If you are unable to care for your rabbits at any time, you must make arrangements for another suitable person to look after them on your behalf. It is important to remember that you remain responsible for your rabbits' needs, even when you are away. The person you leave your rabbits with will also be legally responsible for your rabbits' welfare in your absence. If you own or are responsible for any animals, and fail to meet their welfare needs or cause them unnecessary suffering, you may be prosecuted under the Act.

It is up to you to find out what your rabbits' precise needs are and how to meet them.

The following should be taken into consideration prior to purchase:

- Do you have the time and commitment to look after the rabbits for their entire life?
- Do you have the equipment and space to look after them properly?
- Have you considered maintenance costs, such as feeding, as well as unexpected outlay, including veterinary charges if your animals are injured or unwell?
- Do you have sufficient knowledge in order to fulfil all your rabbits' welfare needs?
- Do you have a plan in place should you go on holiday, become ill or are no longer able to look after your rabbits?



**Check out this
website link for an
estimate of costs:
[www.pdsa.org.uk/
rabbitscost](http://www.pdsa.org.uk/rabbitscost)**



Section 1: How to provide a suitable environment for your rabbits to live in

All rabbits, including those that live indoors, need a safe and clean environment and protection from hazards. Examples of hazards in the home or garden include household and garden chemicals, poisonous plants (including houseplants), electrical cabling and open windows (e.g. French windows) or balconies in high buildings, which your rabbits might try to get out of.

Rabbits are a prey species and their accommodation must be secure enough to protect them from predators, such as dogs, cats, ferrets, foxes and birds of prey.

All rabbits need a safe, comfortable place to rest undisturbed. Living in a cold, draughty or wet place can cause rabbits to suffer. Rabbits must be able to avoid things that scare them, and they all need a place to hide where they feel safe. If unable to hide and avoid threats, your rabbits may suffer anxiety and stress, which can lead to illness.

Rabbits are naturally athletic and inquisitive and need opportunities to run, jump, forage and dig. If rabbits become bored, and do not have enough to do, they may suffer. All rabbits need a large space in which to exercise and display natural behaviours which is permanently attached to their shelter. The exercise area needs to be large enough so all rabbits can perform the same behaviours simultaneously. The shelter needs to be large enough to allow the rabbits to rest together or apart as they choose. Rabbits often choose one latrine area and litter trays can be provided for the purposes of toileting.

In the wild, rabbits live in burrows which have a fairly consistent temperature. Therefore, they are vulnerable to extremes of temperature and must be protected against cold and heat.

Very young rabbits may find a full sized enclosure intimidating and difficult at first. It may be appropriate to temporarily block off part of the run whilst the kits are getting used to their surroundings and socialising with their new owner, ensuring there are plenty of safe hiding places for each rabbit.



All rabbits need a large space in which to exercise and display natural behaviours which is permanently attached to their shelter.

What you should do:

- Whether you keep your rabbits indoors or outside they should be provided with a suitably sized enclosure that allows permanent access to both a secure shelter to rest in and a safe exercise area. Recommended minimum dimensions for housing are 3 x 2 x 1 m (L x W x H) for a compatible pair of small to medium sized rabbits. It may be difficult to buy an enclosure of these dimensions currently but we expect the market to respond and work towards providing these in the near future. Many people already choose to build their own enclosures using garden sheds connected to aviaries and/or runs. See <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-housing/convert-a-garden-shed/>. Larger rabbits or larger groups of rabbits will need more space. These dimensions include both a shelter and living area. Irrespective of the size of the accommodation, all rabbits must have sufficient space to perform all their natural behaviours, including running, hiding, jumping, standing on their hind legs without their ears touching the roof and lying down stretched out without touching the sides of their enclosure. They should also have space to choose to be apart from each other as well as together.
- Provide your rabbits with a safe, comfortable, dry, draught-free, clean and quiet place where they can rest undisturbed.
- Take all reasonable steps to protect your rabbits from hazards, indoors and outdoors.
- Provide your rabbits with a hiding place each which they have constant access to, where they can escape if they feel afraid.
- Whether you keep your rabbits outside or indoors you should check them frequently throughout the day and ensure they are not in danger or distress.
- Rabbits should be provided with a suitable toilet area that is quiet and easily accessible.
- Provide your rabbits with plenty of activities to do and enough space to exercise, stand on their hind limbs without their ears touching the roof of their shelter or enclosure, dig and forage.



- Rabbits should have the opportunity to perform the above behaviours at the times of day when rabbits are naturally most active, i.e. dawn, dusk and overnight. Permanent access to all areas of their accommodation allows for a predictable routine and gives them control over their environment.
- Protect your rabbits from extremes of temperature, wind, rain, sun and predators by ensuring the enclosure is suitably located, predator proof, secure and has areas of shade. The shelter areas need to also be waterproof and well ventilated.
- Rabbit housing should be located away from predators (e.g. dogs, cats, ferrets and birds of prey) and protected from loud noises.
- Do not leave your rabbits in any situation, or for any period of time, that may cause them distress.
- Regularly check your rabbits' housing to ensure it remains safe and secure. For housing kept on grass, check for signs that the rabbits have tried to dig out or that predators have tried to access. For rabbits allowed to run around a garden, ensure they are supervised so they don't come to any harm.
- If you are going away, make sure your rabbits are only ever left with a competent person who can meet their welfare needs.

<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-care-advice/rabbit-housing/convert-a-garden-shed/>





Section 2: How to provide a suitable diet for your rabbits

Rabbits need fresh drinking water at all times. Without water to drink, rabbits will become distressed and seriously ill.

Rabbits need a hay and/or grass based diet to stay fit and healthy. Recommended diets for rabbits consist of 85% good quality hay or fresh/dried grass. 10% leafy greens and 5% commercial food such as nuggets or pellets (see glossary). Good quality hay is green, sweet smelling, fresh, free of dust and mould. The most appropriate commercial foods are specialist nuggets/pellets fed in small quantities as a supplement. Muesli-type/coarse mixtures have been linked with dental and digestive illnesses. If feeding a muesli type rabbit food it is important to ensure **all** the food is eaten before refilling the bowl, as it is a commercial diet which contains a variety of different components. An easier way to guarantee all the components are eaten is to feed nuggets/pellets as each nugget contains the same mix of food ingredients. Speak to your vet and/or pet care specialist for advice on how to gradually change your rabbits to the recommended diet over a period of 14-28 days.

Individual dietary needs depend on many factors including, age, activity and state of health. Some rabbits have special dietary needs. For example, pregnant and nursing rabbits, young growing rabbits, old rabbits and rabbits that are ill.

Rabbits need constant access to good quality, sweet smelling (and free from dust and mould) hay. How much food rabbits need depends on their age, the type of food, bodyweight and level of activity. If rabbits eat more food than they need, they will become overweight and may suffer. If you underfeed your rabbits, they will lose weight and may become ill. Healthy adult rabbits should maintain a stable body weight that is neither too thin nor too fat. Your vet or vet nurse can advise on the correct weight and ideal body shape/body condition score for your rabbits. Monitor your rabbits' weight to ensure they remain at the correct body condition score.

Sudden changes in their diet can make your rabbits ill. Any dietary changes, including treats, should be made gradually over a period of 14-28 days.



Rabbits need constant access to good quality, sweet smelling (and free from dust and mould) hay or fresh/dried grass.



Hay



Straw

What you should do:

- Provide your rabbits with fresh, clean drinking water at all times in a way that they are used to, either a bowl or bottle, although many rabbits prefer a water bowl. Keep the water vessel clean and frequently refreshed. Bottles should be checked at least twice daily to ensure water is flowing.
- Recommended diets for rabbits consist of 85% good quality hay and/or grass, 10% leafy greens and 5% commercial food. Rabbits need their own body size in hay every day. A medium sized rabbit also needs an adult-sized handful of greens and 15g of commercial nuggets/pellets daily. Larger rabbits will require more food.
- Make sure your rabbits have constant access to clean, fresh grass (not grass clippings) or dust-free feeding hay which isn't part of their bedding. A small amount of suitable, fresh greens and commercial food can supplement the hay/grass; these should be kept away from toilet areas.
- Commercial foods, if fed, should be carefully measured to avoid over-feeding. Many experts advise 15g per kg of ideal body weight per rabbit of commercial rabbit nuggets or pellets daily. Feeding quantity is dependent on calorie density so the advice is to feed according to guidance on pack and to weigh using scales. Adjust quantities over time according to body condition score chart. Feeding instructions can be found on most pet food packets.
- Closely monitor your rabbits' weight and ensure they do not become overweight or underweight. Use a body condition score chart to help with this.
- Do not allow your rabbits to over-eat greens and commercial rabbit food as they will eat less hay and could become overweight, which will cause other health problems such as dental disease, digestive problems and obesity.
- If you are uncertain of the diet that your rabbits need, take advice from your vet, pet food manufacturer or other suitably qualified rabbit care specialist.
- Be aware that any change in the amount that your rabbits eat or drink, or a change in food preference may be a sign of ill health. If your rabbits' eating or drinking habits change, consult your vet.
- Be guided by the feeding instructions relating to any commercial rabbit food you buy. Adjust how much of this and any greens are offered depending on the weight of your rabbits, but never restrict the amount of hay or grass offered.
- Provide all rabbits that have special needs, such as those with dental disease, with diets that meet their individual requirements.
- Do not change your rabbits' diet suddenly. Any new foods, including fresh greens, or changes to the diet should be made gradually over a period of 14-28 days.
- Some wild plants and weeds are safe to feed to your rabbits. If you pick these make sure they are non-toxic and taken from areas that aren't contaminated by vehicle fumes, pesticides or fertilisers, or from areas frequented by wild rabbits or dogs. For more information see <https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/recommended-vegetables-and-herbs/>





Section 3 - How to provide for your rabbits' natural behavioural needs

How rabbits behave depends on their age, personality and past experiences. However, most rabbits are active, playful, inquisitive, sociable animals and need to live with another rabbit, playing with toys and interacting with people.

Rabbits are crepuscular, meaning they are active at dawn, dusk and overnight. Therefore, they need constant access to their safe exercise area.

Rabbits' natural behaviours include digging, foraging, hiding, running and standing up on their hind limbs. They must be able to perform all these behaviours in their enclosure.

Rabbits are intelligent animals and can suffer from boredom. If your rabbits are bored, and do not have enough to do, they may suffer or engage in unwanted behaviours, such as chewing their hutch/bars. Changes in behaviour may also indicate that something is wrong with a rabbit's health, and should be checked by a vet. Rabbits who are constantly inactive, fearful or aggressive should also be checked by a vet.

All rabbits need to rest undisturbed, but when they are awake they need opportunities to exercise or display natural behaviours.

Inappropriate environments and handling can cause behavioural problems, often associated with fear as rabbits are prey animals. Therefore it is important they are socialised from a young age (at about 10-14 days onwards) with people and are gently and correctly handled, to prevent fear-related behaviours later in life.



Rabbits are crepuscular, meaning they are active at dawn, dusk and overnight. Therefore, they need constant access to their safe exercise area.

What you should do:

- You should ensure your rabbits receive enough mental, social and physical stimulation to satisfy their individual behavioural needs.
- Provide your rabbits with safe toys and regular opportunities to interact with friendly people. Not all toys are safe. They should be checked regularly for wear and tear and damage. Be aware of tunnels which are too narrow, fabric which can catch claws and avoid rubber items which can be chewed and swallowed.
- Ensure your rabbits are able to rest undisturbed when they want to.
- Make sure your rabbits have permanent access to their exercise area so they can stay fit, happy and healthy.
- Provide your rabbits with somewhere to hide and opportunities to forage and dig at all times, e.g. a large planter filled with earth.
- Rabbits need access to safe and secure hiding/resting places that they can access at all times. There should be one hiding place per rabbit and one spare. These should all have more than one entrance/exit to prevent rabbits from being trapped inside or prevented from entering.
- Make sure your rabbits can reach all the things they need (e.g. bedding, food, water, toilet areas, toys) without having to get too close to things, people or other animals that may scare them. For multiple rabbits in an enclosure, they should be provided with one of everything each.
- You should know how your rabbits behave when fit, healthy and happy. If their behaviour changes or becomes a problem they could be distressed, bored, ill or injured and you should seek advice from a vet or other suitably qualified rabbit care specialist.
- Never shout at or punish your rabbit. They will not understand and will just become more nervous or scared.
- You should only use positive reward-based training, and avoid harsh, potentially painful, training methods.
- Rabbits do not enjoy being picked up so interact with them on the ground and build their trust by letting them come to you.





Section 4 - How to provide the right companionship for your rabbits

Rabbits usually get on well with other rabbits when they have been neutered and properly introduced. Their enclosure should be big enough to allow each rabbit to rest with, or apart from, any other rabbit.

Other species such as guinea pigs are not suitable companions for rabbits.

Rabbits that have been incorrectly introduced to other rabbits, or have been housed with an incompatible rabbit, may have fear and behavioural issues resulting from these experiences. Therefore, these rabbits may be harder to successfully introduce to a new companion rabbit. However, efforts should still be made to do so; this includes carefully selecting a companion and using gradual introductions on neutral territory. An expert such as a qualified animal behaviourist from an organisation accredited by the ABTC <https://abtc.org.uk/> may be able to help with this.

Rabbits which are frightened show characteristic signs such as thumping the ground with their hind feet, flattening their ears against their body, flattening themselves to the ground and a lack of nose twitching; they may also find somewhere to hide. When experiencing extreme fear a rabbit will also emit a loud high pitched scream.

Rabbits are sociable animals that need, and most will enjoy, the companionship of at least one other friendly rabbit.



What you should do:

- Rabbits should be kept with at least one other compatible rabbit. To facilitate harmonious living with other rabbits, all rabbits should be neutered, speak to your vet to obtain advice. A good combination is a neutered male and a neutered female.
- Rabbits should be gradually introduced on neutral territory. Mixing of new pairs and/or widowed animals should be gradually introduced following current good practice (e.g. see RWAf or RSPCA), while paying attention to the health and behaviour of both individual rabbits at all times.
- Rabbits should be monitored daily. If chasing, fighting or mounting behaviour occurs regularly, talk to your vet who may be able to refer you to a clinical animal behaviourist.
- Rabbits should be provided with an area that allows them to be near, and apart from, their companions. For a compatible pair of small to medium sized rabbits, housing measuring 3 x 2 x 1 m (L x W x H) should allow them to do this.
- Provide sufficient resources for all rabbits (e.g. toys, bedding, toilet areas and hiding places) and give them enough space so they can get away from one another if they want to. Each rabbit should have their own feeding and watering station, as well as hiding/resting places (with multiple entrance/exit points) and toileting areas.
- Scatter feeding part or all of the daily allowance of nuggets/pellets and/or leafy greens is recommended to prevent one rabbit guarding the food and also helps replicate natural foraging behaviours.
- Make sure your rabbits have opportunities to positively interact with people everyday.
- Never leave your rabbits unsupervised with another animal or person who may harm or frighten them, such as young children who may unintentionally do this.
- Ensure that rabbits in your care are handled properly and are not stressed or endangered by other adults, children or animals. As rabbits are prey species, they can find being picked up stressful. Handling them at ground level rather than picking them up will likely keep them calmer.
- Early life experiences can affect how rabbits will behave when they are older. Rabbits should be very slowly and gently handled when they are young and allowed to experience other everyday noises and stimuli that they will likely face when older.
- When you are away, make sure your rabbits are properly cared for by a responsible person who will check on them regularly throughout the day. When someone else is looking after your rabbits they also have a legal responsibility to ensure their welfare, and you should ensure that they understand their needs and any special requirements that they may have. You are still legally responsible for the rabbits even when they are not with you.

Handling them at ground level rather than picking them up will likely keep them calmer.





Section 5 - How to keep your rabbits healthy and protect them from pain, suffering, injury and disease

Rabbits feel pain and have pain thresholds like people. However, as rabbits are prey animals they may not show outward signs of suffering or being in pain. Any changes in the way a rabbit behaves can be an early sign that they may be ill or in pain. Rabbits which are ill or in pain may often change their eating and/or drinking habits. They may eat less or may stop eating and lose weight. They may drink water excessively, drink less or not at all. Any of these symptoms need investigation. Due to the way in which their digestive system works, any changes in these habits can very quickly be fatal, therefore, veterinary attention should be sought without delay.

Some rabbits may become aggressive or develop unwanted habits such as not using their litter tray (when previously trained to do so) or repetitive behaviours (e.g. bar biting, chewing their housing). They may also hide more than usual. Any changes in behaviour should be investigated, consulting a vet or clinical animal behaviourist when necessary.

They may also show specific signs of ill health such as:

- discharge from the eyes or nose
- excessive salivation
- sneezing
- head tilt
- wet or dirty bottoms
- they may scratch excessively or develop skin sores.

This list is for guidance only and is not exhaustive.



Rabbits are vulnerable to a range of infectious diseases and other illnesses. They need protection from myxomatosis and rabbit (viral) haemorrhagic disease, R(V)HD, (strains 1 and 2), which can be provided via annual vaccinations.



This applies to all rabbits whether they live indoors or outside. Like us, rabbits benefit from routine health care, which would include checking their teeth and nails are of a suitable length and shape, regular grooming, preventative parasitic treatments where appropriate and checking for flystrike especially during warmer weather. Your vet will be able to discuss all of this with you and show you how to check your rabbits for signs of ill health including their teeth, nails and bottoms. Be aware that placing your rabbits on their back invokes a fear response - they are not relaxed in this position and are actually very stressed. Therefore, avoid placing your rabbits on their back during general handling, petting and when health checking them.

Rabbits produce two types of droppings - hard, dry pellets and softer, moist pellets which they eat directly from their bottoms and are essential to their diet. They must be able to consume these. You need to familiarise yourself with the size and amount of hard, dry pellets that your rabbits produce daily and note any change to the size or consistency of these. Any uneaten moist droppings in their environment or stuck to them is an indication that there is a health or dietary problem. Veterinary advice should be sought in either event.

It is possible to train rabbits to enter a pet carrier themselves if it is front opening, but make sure it also opens at the top to get them out easily e.g. at the vets. When lifting rabbits make sure you support them properly.

Rabbits which can be easily identified, e.g. by microchip, are more likely to be reunited with their owner if lost or stolen. Vets will be able to contact owners straight away if their pets are found injured - this is why it is so important to keep your contact details up to date with the microchip database where your pet is registered.

Many people choose to have their rabbits neutered and this has many benefits. It prevents unwanted pregnancies, reduces the risk of some cancers and unwanted behaviours such as spraying and aggression, and enables rabbits to live together harmoniously. Vets will advise on neutering and the associated health and welfare benefits, as well as discussing any risk factors. If you decide to breed your rabbits, your vet can advise on the risk to the rabbit and any inherited conditions that could affect the welfare of the kittens, such as ear, eye and dental problems relating to certain head shapes.

What you should do:

- Take sensible precautions to keep your rabbits safe from hazards, injury, theft and predation.
- If you notice changes in your rabbits' behaviour you should contact your vet and follow the advice you are given.
- Check your rabbits over regularly and watch out for signs of injury, disease or illness. This would include checking the bottoms and mouth/face areas are dry and clean.
- Rabbits should be checked over at least daily, twice daily in warmer weather, for any signs of flystrike - maggots. Flystrike can quickly be fatal so it is important that you contact your vet immediately as your rabbit needs to be seen urgently.
- Make sure someone else carries out the above daily checks if you are away.
- Teeth should also be regularly checked to ensure they are not overgrown or misaligned - only a vet should correct these problems.
- You should carefully check each rabbit's coat regularly and groom them, to maintain a healthy coat. Grooming should include checking and trimming nails if necessary (taking advice on how to do this from a vet).
- You should check daily that your rabbits are producing normal hard, dry pellets and there are no uneaten softer, moist pellets either in the environment or stuck to them. If their toileting habits change, droppings become smaller or fewer in quantity consult your vet.
- If you recognise signs and symptoms of disease or suspect any of your rabbits are in pain, ill or injured, contact a vet promptly and follow veterinary advice regarding treatment. If at any time you have concerns about the health or welfare of your rabbits, you should seek advice from a vet or suitably qualified specialist.
- You should register your rabbits with a vet and keep their contact details handy, including out of hours contact information. Whilst all vets can treat your rabbits if they are poorly and provide preventative treatment and advice, some have gained further knowledge and training and have greater experience when dealing with rabbits than others. The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund website has a list of 'rabbit savvy' vets (rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-friendly-vets) and you may want to consider registering with one of these practices if they are local to you.



Example of flystrike and maggots.



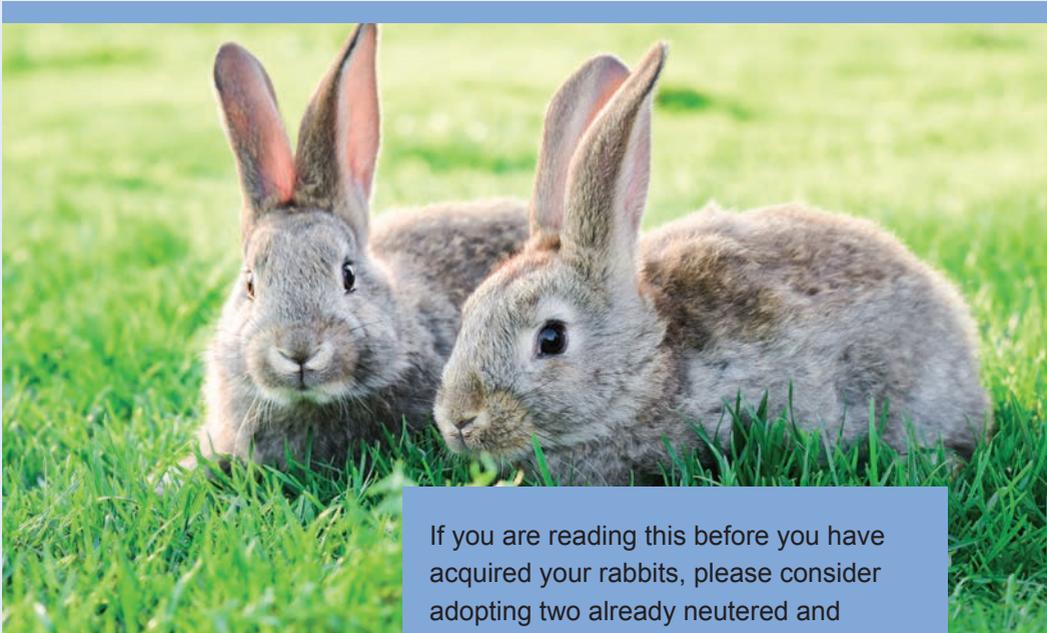
Monitor for change in poo size

- You should ask your vet about the things you can do to protect your rabbits' health, and follow the advice given at their annual or six-monthly health check.
- Your vet is the best person to ask about routine preventative health care such as vaccination and neutering, as well as any current health problems your rabbits might have. This is an essential part of keeping your rabbits healthy.
- For rabbits to live together compatibly and for their individual health and welfare you should have them neutered. Your vet will be able to advise you about neutering and the best age to have this done.
- Clean your rabbits' accommodation daily, especially toilet areas, to help avoid disease transmission.
- Medicines intended for humans and other animals can kill rabbits. It is important that your rabbits are only given medicines authorised for rabbits or that have been specifically prescribed or advised by your vet for your rabbits.
- You should always consult your vet if you are concerned that any of your rabbits have eaten or come into contact with anything that could be harmful. You should also be aware that rabbits regularly groom themselves and may ingest or come into contact with a poisonous substance when doing so.
- Any loss of appetite can quickly be fatal and requires urgent veterinary attention.
- You should seek the advice of your vet before allowing your rabbits to breed and take all reasonable steps to ensure that you will be able to find suitable home for the kittens.
- Try to minimise fear and stress in your rabbits' daily life. By doing so you can decrease their risk of certain illnesses.
- Wherever possible, all interactions with rabbits should take place at ground level. If it is absolutely necessary to pick up a rabbit, only an adult or responsible older child should do this. Rabbits should be interacted with on a daily basis; where possible, interactions should be positive for the rabbit.
- Make sure your rabbits can be identified, i.e. with a microchip, so that they can be reunited with you if lost or stolen. If you move house or change your phone number, make sure you update your contact details with the database you are registered with.
- As a prey species, rabbits can be stressed and frightened in the presence of predatory species. If you own dogs and/or cats, keep your rabbits away from them.

Rabbits should be checked over at least daily, twice daily in warmer weather, for any signs of flystrike - maggots

Rabbit shopping list and space requirements

- Suitable shelter and living area 3 x 2 x 1 m - as a minimum
- Hiding places
- Water bowl and bottle
- Food dish
- Good quality hay and/or grass to eat
- Litter tray and suitable litter e.g. non-clumping, wood-based litter; avoid clay-based materials
- Hay/straw for bedding
- Good quality rabbit nuggets or pellets (not muesli)
- Suitable fresh greens or leafy vegetables
- Safe toys
- Somewhere suitable to dig e.g. a large planter filled with earth



If you are reading this before you have acquired your rabbits, please consider adopting two already neutered and vaccinated rabbits from a good rescue centre who can offer help and support. There are around 67,000 rabbits looking for good homes in rescue every year in the UK.

One last thing you will need is a good vet. Look on rabbitwelfare.co.uk for a list of rabbit friendly vets in your area.

Glossary of terms:



RABBIT MUESLI / COARSE MIXES

Coarse mix definition: a mixture of ingredients where you can see all the individual ingredients that are mixed. Often referred to as 'muesli', 'muesli-style' products.

A dry multi-component pet food where a variety of different ingredients are combined. These mixes can include whole, flaked, or rolled cereals and legumes, fruits, seeds, nuts, forage stalks and other composite products (forage based extrusions or pellets, which may be a vehicle for adding micronutrients (vitamins, minerals, and trace elements to the food).

They can be complete or complementary.

Differences in ingredient dimensions and densities may cause settling and alter the composition of the mix.

Selective feeding may be a problem if bowls are over-filled and continually topped up.



FORAGES

Forage definition: Foodstuffs for herbivorous animals.

Traditionally 'forages' were limited to a few different types of hay (dried grass), but more recently the term has also come to include a variety of dried plant leaves, herbs, and flowers.

Broadly speaking there are 3 types of hay: grass (ryegrass, fescues, timothy), legume (alfalfa, clover, vetch), and cereal (barley, wheat, oat). However, cereal hay is more often called straw and used as bedding (except for green oat hay, which is harvested with seed-heads intact).

The most commonly available forage is 'meadow hay', a hay composed of a variable mixture of grasses (mainly ryegrass, fescue, occasionally clover) and other naturally occurring meadow plants / flowers. Timothy is one of the most popular hays. Hays are typically dried in the field, with regular turning, but barn- and air-dried products are becoming more popular. Under the forage banner there is also a huge variety of different plant leaves, herbs, and flowers, which are presented as individual products and/or in forage mixes.

Forages are 'complementary' feedstuffs.

There can be tremendous variation in nutrient levels between forages, based on species, season, harvesting and storage conditions, and ratio of stalk to leaf.



EXTRUDED NUGGETS

Nugget definition: A small chunk or lump of a substance.

Nuggets are mostly extruded expanded products and can occasionally be baked.

They can be complete or complementary. Variation in ingredient and nutritional composition between nuggets within a batch should be minimal. Although mostly sold as mono-component products, extruded nuggets can be included in coarse mixes.



COMPRESSED PELLETS

Pellet definition: A small, often cylindrical, compressed mass of a substance.

Pellets are compressed products.

They can be complete or complementary. Pellets can be included in coarse mixes or presented as a mono-component diet. There should be minimal variation in ingredient and nutritional composition between pellets within a batch.

Annex 1:

These Codes of Practice are supported by:

All Party Group for Animal Welfare (APGAW)
Animal Behaviour and Training Council (ABTC)
Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF)
Blue Cross
British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA)
British Veterinary Association (BVA)
British Veterinary Zoological Society (BVZS)
Companion Animal Sector Council (CASC)
People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)
Pets at Home
Pet Industry Federation (PIF)
Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)
Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund (RWA&F)
UK Pet Food
Woodgreen Pets Charity

Sources of further information:

Veterinary practice teams are a great source of information and help for anyone planning to get a pet. You can contact the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons to find details of vets in your area. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London. SW1P 2AF: www.rcvs.org.uk - the website had a "find a vet" facility. <https://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/find-a-vet/>

Local libraries and bookshops for up-to-date books on rabbit care.

Websites such as:

- ABTC abtc.org.uk/
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) www.bsava.com/
- Defra www.gov.uk - has information on the Animal Welfare Act 2006
- Blue Cross www.bluecross.org.uk
- British Veterinary Association www.bva.co.uk
- PDSA www.pdsa.org.uk
- Pet Industry Federation www.petfederation.co.uk
- UK Pet Food www.ukpetfood.org
- Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund (RWA&F) www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals www.rspca.org.uk
- RCVS "Find a Vet" service at www.findavet.rcvs.org.uk for health, nutrition or behavioural advice
- Wood Green Pets Charity woodgreen.org.uk

This good practice code for the welfare of rabbits applies to all companion rabbits.

The purpose of the Code is to provide practical guidance to help you to comply with the provisions of Section 9 of the Act. It does not tell you precisely how to care for rabbits, but summarises important things you should consider when making decisions about how best to care for your rabbits. Breach of a provision of this Code is not an offence in itself but, if proceedings are brought against you for an offence under Section 9 of the Act, the Court will look at whether or not you have complied with the Code in deciding whether you have committed an offence. If you are unsure about anything to do with the care of your rabbits you should always seek advice from an expert. Throughout this Code the term “vet” will be used to refer to a veterinary surgeon. You will also find reference in the Code to “other suitably qualified rabbit care specialists”. These are people who, through qualification and experience, can provide expert advice on rabbit welfare. Examples include veterinary nurses, animal behaviourists, and staff at animal welfare organisations. Other sources of information are listed in Annex 1. You can find out more about the Act and other legislation relating to rabbits at www.defra.gov.uk.

