

# Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

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## Care of Rabbits

### **Lifespan:**

7-10 years

### **Diet:**

#### Hay

- Adults rabbits should have free access to grass hay (timothy, orchard grass, oat, etc) at all times to promote good dental and GI health.
- Juvenile rabbits and rabbits that are pregnant or lactating should also be provided with alfalfa hay, which is higher in calories, protein, and calcium.

#### Pellets

- Juvenile rabbits and rabbits that are pregnant or lactating should have free access to an alfalfa-based pellet.
- Adult rabbits should be fed a timothy-based pellet. Many adult rabbits should be fed a limited amount of pellets to encourage hay consumption and prevent obesity. Please consult your veterinarian to determine the appropriate amount of pellets to feed your adult rabbit.
- All rabbits should be fed a plain, hay-based pellet that does not contain added grains, dried fruits, nuts, or seeds, as these items are too high in carbohydrates and fat.

#### Greens

- Greens are a good source of enrichment and help to maintain good hydration, which is important for urinary health. They rarely cause diarrhea when introduced slowly and fed in appropriate quantities.
- All rabbits should be provided with a daily salad that is approximately the size of the rabbit when loosely packed. We recommend feeding a wide variety of greens – see provided greens handout for suggestions.

Treats: **Limit to:** 1 heaping tablespoon, per 2 lbs. of body weight per day

- Strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, cranberries
- Apples, kiwi, peaches, cherries, pears, mangos, melons, papaya
- Peppers, cucumber, carrots, turnips, beets, sweet potatoes
- Avoid commercial treats (e.g. yogurt drops, seed balls), which are high in fat and sugar

#### Fresh water

- Water bottles should be checked daily for malfunctions

- Many rabbits prefer to drink from a bowl, so providing water this way may encourage them to stay hydrated. Be sure to choose a heavy, wide-based bowl to prevent spills!

Mineral blocks and supplements are not necessary for a rabbit on an appropriate diet.

### **Housing:**

- Minimum cage dimensions (bigger is better!)
  - Small breeds: 24'x 24'x 18'
  - Large breeds: 36'x 36'x 24'
- Should have solid floor area to avoid foot sores
  - Appropriate bedding options include recycled paper bedding, fleece, or area rugs. Avoid wood shavings, which contain respiratory and skin irritants and (in some cases) liver toxins.
- Avoid cages with solid walls to allow good ventilation
- Many rabbits also do well being free-range in a rabbit-proofed room or exercise pen.

### **Litter Box Training:**

- Start with a small area, pick a corner where the rabbit has already used, add a litter box to that corner.
- Recycled paper or pelleted litters should be used – avoid clay cat litter.
- Add a small amount of hay on top of the litter to entice the rabbit to sit in box
- Reward pet when it uses the box, **NEVER** punish pet while in the litter box
- **REMEMBER:** Rabbits are not cats, and are not likely to use the litter box 100% of the time!

### **Exercise & Enrichment:**

- Rabbits need plenty of time (at least a few hours) out of the cage daily to provide exercise. Lack of exercise may contribute to the development numerous medical problems, including obesity, sore hocks, and bladder sludge.
- Make your rabbit work for her food by offering greens stuffed in a toilet paper roll or pellets in a cardboard egg carton.
- Provide lots of items for your rabbit to chew on, including chewing sticks (pesticide and dye free, of course!) and wicker or grass-based toys.
- Many rabbits enjoy supervised time outdoors. Be sure that your rabbit's outdoor time is always supervised and in an escape-proof area that is not treated with pesticides. Rabbits overheat easily, so limit outdoor time to dawn and dusk in the summer.

### **Schedule of Veterinary Care:**

- Annual physical exam (every 6 months for older rabbits)
- Spaying/neutering at 3-6 months of age
- Nail trims as needed, if unable to trim at home
- NOTE: Rabbits that are not eating or producing normal feces for more than 12 hours should be evaluated by a veterinarian as soon as possible.