

Pets Operational Procedure

P12 – Rabbits Information

Rabbits are curious, intelligent, highly social animals that can live 10+ years, but are sadly quite often misunderstood and are one of the most neglected animals in the UK. Unfortunately, they are often seen as easy, cheap, starter pets, this couldn't be further from the truth.

They should never live alone, they always need to have at least one friend. We will always rehome them as a pair/group or to be bonded to the adopter's current rabbit(s). Bonding can be stressful and some can be very picky over who they want to be friends with. Personality is generally the biggest factor over whether they will bond, rather than gender, size, age, etc.

They can live indoors or outdoors, but they need 24/7 access to a safe space of at least 3m x 2m x 1m high. They need to be able to display their natural behaviours: digging, running, hiding and jumping, with plenty of enrichment.

Rabbits' diets should be 85% hay/grass, 10% greens and 5% pellets. Hay is the most important part of their diet as it prevents their teeth from over growing and is also high in fibre. Rabbits graze throughout the day so they should always have plenty of hay available.

Rabbits are prey animals and the majority of them don't like to be picked up as it's in their nature so see this as danger. They will also hide signs of pain, so it's very important to look out for subtle changes in behaviour. Some of the most common health issues in rabbits are:

- **Dental problems** - rabbits' teeth grow constantly. Their incisors (front teeth) can overgrow and their molars (back teeth) can develop spurs (sharp points) on them that can then dig into their cheeks and tongue, which is extremely painful and can cause them to stop eating. If they show any signs of drooling or runny eyes this could be a sign of dental problems.
- **GI Stasis** - this is where the digestive system slows down or stops moving, causing food and painful gas to build up, resulting in the rabbit stopping eating or pooping. This is usually a symptom of another underlying issue, such as pain, stress or poor diet and requires urgent attention as it can be fatal.

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Author	Hayley
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- **E Cuniculi (EC)** - this is a microscopic parasite that primarily affects the nervous system. It can cause neurological issues and can damage the kidneys. Signs of infection include head tilt, loss of balance and weakness/paralysis in their back legs. It is important that a course of Panacur (anti-parasitic drug) is started as soon as possible.

- **Fly strike** - this is where flies lay eggs on the rabbit, which then hatch into maggots that feed on their flesh. It develops very quickly and if not treated quick enough it can be fatal. Any rabbit can get flystrike but it is more common in warmer weather and the flies are most attracted to wounds or dirty/damp fur. So it is important that we check rabbits for dirty bottoms and keep them as clean as possible.

Before rehoming, all our rabbits are given a full health check, vaccinated and neutered. If you want to learn more about rabbits, a good resource is rabbitwelfare.co.uk