

Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital
1785 Wilmington Pike
Glen Mills, PA 19342
Tel: (610) 558-0100 Fax: (610) 558-0102
Email: info@gmveterinary.com

We are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your pet's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your pet's health, please feel free to contact us. One of the technicians or doctors will be happy to help you.

RABBITS

Rabbits make absolutely great pets as long as certain expectations are met and they're being properly cared for, as with any pet. Knowing what makes a rabbit a good pet and what doesn't make a rabbit a good fit for your family is very important.

Being very social mammals, rabbits require lots of attention and gentle handling as well as activity. This forms close bonds with their owners. They're extremely playful and very entertaining to watch. Rabbits do need a significantly sized cage and better housed indoors so they can get more socialization as opposed to being housed outdoors. Just like some other small mammals, they can even be litter trained which helps for easier clean up.

The average life span of a bunny is anywhere from 5 to 15 years, 15 being some of the oldest cases recorded. And in case you are wondering, there is no difference between a bunny and a rabbit 😊

HOUSING

The standard rabbit cage measures 24 inches long and wide, however depending on breed and size of your rabbit, they can be up to 36 inches long and wide. Height is also important as you want to make sure the rabbit can stand up on its hind legs without hitting the top of the cage. A cage too small can cause many problems such as obesity, pododermatitis, poor bone density and muscle tone, GI and urinary issues, as well as behavioral problems. A solid cage bottom is recommended compared to a wire bottom to prevent sore hocks and an area for resting. A good example for a substrate is recycled newspaper or aspen shavings. Bedding such as cedar shavings are not recommended because they tend to release toxic fumes.

It's important for your rabbit to get ample time and exercise outside of the cage. In these cases, make sure that your house is completely rabbit-proofed. You want to eliminate the areas that your rabbit can get wedged into or escape from. Common items such as electrical cords are a hazard as rabbits find them fun to chew, as well as carpet that they love digging into and chewing. To prevent these, giving your rabbit plenty of safe, chewable toys will distract them from other household items like these.

Training a rabbit to use the litter box is relatively easy. You want to start by keeping your rabbit in its cage or a small section of the room with a filled litter box in the corner. Make sure the litter box is low enough to allow the bunny to hop in and out with ease. Putting some droppings in the box on top of the litter shows them where it's appropriate for them to go. Often times bunnies eat and defecate at the same time so it wouldn't hurt to add some hay to the box. You can reward your rabbit when he or

Sources:

she uses the litter box with one of the treat foods on our “Safe Foods” list. Bunnies learn best by positive reinforcement, NEVER punishment.

Luckily, rabbits and indoor cats, even well-behaved dogs, tend to get along just fine! This is definitely a case-by-case basis as with any pets. Making sure your dog responds to commands around the pet before being left alone with a free-roaming rabbit is very important as dogs tend to have more playful impulses than rabbits do.

Check out the House Rabbit Society by going to rabbit.org for even more information on rabbit housing and husbandry.

DIET

Unfortunately, rabbits cannot live off of raw carrots as the cartoons of our past-times suggest. The diet of a rabbit can be a little complicated if you are not familiar with them. They need lots of grass hay and fresh vegetables in addition to a limited amount of pellets. Their gastrointestinal tract allows them to extract nutrients from a variety of plants. Rabbits like to graze on flowers and fruits as well, making the most out of what they eat.

Rabbits require hay at all times. Alfalfa hay is not recommended for adult rabbits where as **Timothy hay or other grass hay should be offered 24/7 in unlimited quantities and should be fresh at all times.** Hay contains fiber which is extremely important for normal and healthy intestinal function. If your rabbit ever stops eating hay for a few hours to one day, they should be seen for an appointment immediately as this can substantially cause a problem or be the sign of a problem.

Fresh veggies should be given to your rabbit daily. For the average 5 lb rabbit, 2 cups of fresh vegetables should be the daily portion, more or less depending on its size. The majority of greens you're serving should contain romaine lettuce, spring mix, or dandelion greens plus a variety of other green vegetables. If you're starting your pet on fresh food for the first time, it's a good idea to gradually introduce them to their diet, adding a new food from our list every 3-5 days.

Fruits are referred to as treat foods. Large quantities of fruits are not recommended as fruits are comparable to desserts for humans and should only be given in very limited amounts. Most fruits are safe to use as treats, however bananas specifically can be very fattening and can be addicting to rabbits. It's safe to use fresh fruit or dried fruit, however dried fruits should also be given in very small amounts.

BEHAVIOR

Rabbits tend to have their own language and it's up to us to figure them out. They respond well when they're handled and cared for properly. Handling is a big part of how they behave. Rabbits' backbones can easily fracture and create serious spinal injuries when not handled correctly. It's important to always support their legs and hind end. When their legs hang freely they feel unprotected and can struggle or kick out causing permanent damage.

Rabbits tend to express how they're feeling through body language. Here's a list of motions pulled from South Wilton Veterinary Group's handout called “Rabbit Behavior”:

Sources:

- **Chinning** — their chins contains scent glands, so they rub their chin on items to indicate that they belong to them. Same as a cat rubbing its forehead on people and objects.
- **Binky/Binkying** — (Dancing and hopping madly): A sign of pure joy & happiness!
- **Upside down, legs in the air** — Apparent bliss, and often after a big bout of binkying.
- **Flat on the ground, legs spread out to the side or behind** — Relaxed and comfortable
- **Standing on Hind Legs** — May be checking something out and investigating. Also used for begging. Rabbits can be worse than dogs about begging, especially for sweets! Beware of giving the rabbit treats as overweight rabbits are not as healthy as trim rabbits.
- **Territorial droppings** — Droppings that are not in a pile, but are scattered, are signs that this territory belongs to the rabbit. This will often occur upon entering a new environment. If another rabbit lives in the same house this may always be a nuisance.
- **Playing** — Rabbits like to push or toss objects around. They may also race madly around the house, jump on and off of the couch and act like a kid that's had too much sugar.
- **Thumping** — often frightened, mad or trying to tell you that there's danger (in their opinion). Fun fact: Rabbits often are displeased when you rearrange their stuff. They are creatures of habit and when they get things just right, they like them to remain that way, and may thump in anger.
- **Tooth Grinding** — Indicates contentment, like a cats purr. Loud grinding can indicate pain.
- **Tooth Chattering** — loud grinding or chattering can indicate pain.
- **Sniffing** — May be annoyed or just talking to you. Some unspayed females sniff loudly when being handled.
- **Grunts** — Usually angry, watch out or you could get bit!
- **Honking** — Sign of horniness, usually in an unneutered male.
- **Shrill scream** — Extreme pain or fear.
- **Feet circling** — usually indicates sexual behavior. He/She's in love.
- **Spraying** — Males that are not neutered will mark female rabbits in this manner as well as their territory. Females will also spray.
- **Pulling out hair; collecting hay** — this could be a pregnancy or a false pregnancy. Usually just unspayed females may build a nest & pull hair from their chest & stomach to line the nest. They may even stop eating as rabbits do the day before they give birth.

SPAYING AND NEUTERING

Spaying and neutering your rabbit is recommended to prevent certain diseases or cancers that can develop over time in intact bunnies. Female rabbits can develop a malignant cancer called Uterine Adenocarcinoma at as young as two years of age. Male rabbits can develop a disease of their reproductive organs as well but less often than females. Males tend to show signs of aggression in their adolescence and can start spraying urine to mark their territory. Neutering your male rabbit before this behavior occurs or shortly after it starts will control it much better.

Sources: