

Caring for your RABBIT



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Welcome

Here at the Lawn Veterinary Centre, we understand that a strong bond of affection soon grows between you and your rabbit and that in order to enjoy this bond for as long as possible, you must play an active role in maintaining your pet's health.



Left to right: The Lawn Veterinary Team – Anne, Evelyne, Paul, Michelle, Sam, Kirstie and Aida

This free e-book will help you to keep track of all the most important healthcare measures, including those administered by your vet and those you need to perform yourself.

Please note that although this publication provides some key points to help you maintain your pet's health, it is not intended to replace professional advice from a Veterinary Surgeon or Veterinary Nurse. If you have any queries, particularly if you notice any changes in your rabbit's behaviour or health, please call us on 01793 644422.

We wish you and your pet a long and happy life together!



Lifetime Plan for your Rabbit

ONCE YOU HAVE YOUR RABBIT

Preventative Healthcare Advice with a Veterinary Nurse

Discussion on nutrition, fleas, mites, worms, vaccination

and insurance

Advice on behaviour, socialisation and training

Health examination with the Veterinary Surgeon if required

FROM 5 WEEKS: Full health examination by a Veterinary Surgeon

Primary vaccination protecting against Myxomatosis and

VHD

Advice on parasite control, neutering, microchipping and

insurance

6 MONTHS: Full health examination with Veterinary Nurse. Discussion

on neutering, parasite control and microchipping

Advice on weight, nutrition, behaviour and training

Dental Health Check

13-14 MONTHS AND

ANNUALLY:

Full health examination by a Veterinary Surgeon and

booster vaccination, and advice on administration of

Rearguard

Dental Health check

AND THEN 6-MONTHLY:

Full health examination with Veterinary Nurse including

6-MONTHLY: Dental Health Check



Vaccination

KEY POINTS

- The combined vaccination must be repeated annually for complete protection. Twice-yearly Health Examinations give peace of mind.
- VHD vaccination is annual



Vaccination provides protection against life-threatening diseases, which for rabbits are Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD). Unfortunately we still see rabbits that have these diseases, although they are usually preventable through vaccination.

A combined vaccination is now available which covers both of these deadly diseases. Your rabbit will be given a full health examination before each annual vaccination and it is important that any pet has a health examination at least twice a year to ensure all is well – a year is much longer to them than it is to us, and prevention is better than cure!

MYXOMATOSIS

Myxomatosis is a deadly disease seen in both wild and pet rabbits. It is spread by flies and biting insects. Initial signs start with conjunctivitis, and then swellings on the head and anal/genital areas appear. Affected rabbits get weak and eventually die. The disease can be passed by flies and fleas that have been in contact with an infected rabbit, as well as direct contact with an infected rabbit.

VIRAL HAEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD) is fatal, with death occurring within 48 hours. The virus causes major internal bleeding. Some rabbits may have bleeding from the nose or back passage, but quite often the rabbit will die with no outward signs. The virus is easily transmitted and can survive in the environment for months. It can be passed on through direct contact with an infected rabbit or through indirect contact with other animals, insects, owners, on the wind or from untreated hay.



Parasites

KEY POINTS

- Parasites are seriously debilitating. Prevention and early detection are essential.
- Worm your outdoor rabbit regularly
- Treat external parasites as soon as symptoms appear



Parasites rely on another animal to complete their life cycle. It is very important that these are controlled to prevent irritation, debilitation, weight loss and the spread of infectious diseases.

FLEAS

Fleas help to spread diseases such as Myxomatosis. It is important to treat the environment as well as your rabbit to ensure re-infestation doesn't occur. Check for little black specks of flea dirt in the coat. If you are not sure if what you find is flea dirt, then place the sample on a white piece of paper and add a drop of water. If you see the sample dissolving or red coming from the edges, then this is positive for flea dirt. Should any of these diseases be present, please call 01793 644422 and collect our recommended parasite control. If you are a Wise Pet Care Plan member, you will receive a discount on the cost of any flea treatment purchased from the Lawn Veterinary Centre.

FUR MITES (including Cheyletiella)

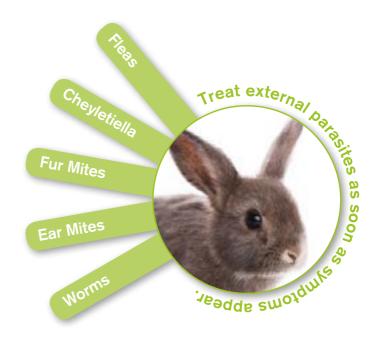
These are little mites that live on the surface of the skin and feed on serum beneath the skin surface. They are associated with milder spring weather, a lack of vitamin C in the diet or the presence of an underlying disease and can cause hair loss, scurfy skin and itching. The presence of fur mites is not always easy to determine, but may be visible as dark specs on the fur, particularly on white rabbits. A thorough examination should be carried out to rule out any underlying causes.

EAR MITES

Ear mites are visible to the naked eye and can cause excessive wax build up. They can cause irritation and so the rabbit may shake his or her head, or rub their ears along the ground. In severe cases sedation is needed to get rid of all the mites. Please book your rabbit in with a vet if you are concerned – your Wise Pet Care Plan discount will apply to this consultation if you are a member.

WORMS

Rabbits get pin worms, which are about 5mm long. They can be found in the faeces or around the anus of the rabbit. Outdoor rabbits may need worming to control any worm burden. We can recommend a product for purchase and of course your Wise Pet Care Plan discount will apply.



Nutrition

Quite simply, rabbits eat grass. It is high in fibre, contains moderate levels of protein and is low in fat and sugar. In an ideal world, rabbits would have free access to gardens in order for them to eat all the grass they need. However, this is not always convenient for us.

We can provide a diet that is high in fibre that maintains dental health and a healthy gut. It is a diet of:

- · Grass and hay
- Small amount of pellet food
- Vegetables

Your vet or Veterinary Nurse will be able to recommend a suitable product to be provided as the pellet portion of your rabbit's diet. Pellet food is designed as a complementary food so that it is fed alongside grass, hay and vegetables.

If you are planning to change the pellet portion of the diet, then this must be done slowly (e.g. over a two-week period). Similarly, if you want to increase the grass, hay and vegetable portion of the diet, this should also be done gradually.

Rabbits must also have free access to water, either using a bowl or bottle. It is very important that the bottle or bowl must be cleaned twice daily to prevent contamination or bacterial infection.

Remember, it is normal for rabbits to eat the sticky droppings that they produce. These caecotrophs are passed at night and basically contain fibre and bacteria. Rabbits will eat these as soon as they are passed in order to re-digest and extract essential nutrients.

Rabbits will also eat the leaves and branches of apple and hazel trees. The branches provide ideal gnawing material.







Poisonous Plants

Many people allow their rabbit free run of the garden during the summer months, believing that they will instinctively avoid eating poisonous plants. However, this is not always the case and a rabbit must be confined to its run unless all poisonous plants are removed.

If your rabbit has a free run of the garden, it will be necessary to remove any poisonous plants. Alternatively, place a piece of chicken wire around the plant to prevent access by the rabbit. If the rabbit has a run, ensure that the plant is not in contact with the wire, as he may nibble it through the wire.

Garden pesticides and herbicides may contain chemicals that are toxic to rabbits, so it's important to avoid spraying weeds in areas where your rabbit may graze. Plants collected from the roadside may be covered in dirt and exhaust fumes, which contain lead and may be lethal to rabbits. Farmers sometimes use chemical sprays to control pests and weeds and plants that are collected may have spray residue on them. It is essential to remember that you must be able to correctly identify the plant that you wish to feed your rabbit to ensure that it is not toxic – some harmful plants can look similar to beneficial ones.

YOUR RABBIT SHOULD NOT HAVE ACCESS TO POISONOUS PLANTS, WHICH INCLUDE:

- Agave
- All plants growing from bulbs, e.g. daffodils, tulips
- Amaryllis
- Anemones
- Antirrhinums
- Arum (Lords and Ladies
- Avocado leaves
- Azalea
- Bindweed
- Bittersweet

- Bluebell
- Boxwood
- Bracken
- Bryony
- Buttercip
- Cadura
- Caladium
- Castor oil plant
- Celandine
- Charlock
- Chrysanthemums
- Clematis
- Cloth of gold
- Columbine
- Crocus
- Cvclamer
- Dahlia
- Deadley Nightshade
- Delphiniums
- Dock leaves (once

flowers appear and leaves become woody)

- Dog's mercury
- Fia
- Figwort
- Fool's Parsley
- Foxglove
- Ground elder (once the flowers appear)
- Ground iv
- Gypsophilia
- Hellebore
- Hemlock
- Henbane
- Holly
- Honeveuckle
- Horse Chestnut
- Horsetails
- Hyacinth
- Iris



(CONT.)

- lvy berries

- Laburnum
- Laurels
- Leyland Cypress
- Lilies
- Lily of the Valley
- Linseed oil cake (in
- Lobelia
- Love-in-a-mist

- Lupins
- Marsh Marigold
- Meadow saffron
- Mistletoe
- Monkshood
- Morning Glory
- Most evergreen trees
- Nightshades (all types)
 - Oak leaves
- Oleander
- Philodendron
- Pokeweed
- Poppies
- Potato tops
- Primroses
- Privet

- Ragwort
- Rhododendron
- Solomon's seal
- Speedwell
- Spindle tree
- St John's Wort
- Sumach trees
- Toadflax
- Wild celery
- Wood sorrel
- Woody Nightshade

Neutering

KEY POINTS

- Neutering prevents aggression and cancer
- We recommend all rabbits are neutered.

We recommend that all male and female rabbits should be neutered, unless they are intended for breeding.

WHAT IS NEUTERING?

In the male (buck), this is called castration, and simply involves removing both testicles. In the female (doe), the operation is commonly called spaying, where both ovaries and the uterus are removed.

WHEN SHOULD THE OPERATION BE PERFORMED?

Male rabbits can be neutered from 4 months and female rabbits can be neutered from 4 months of age.

WHY SHOULD I HAVE MY RABBIT NEUTERED?

Neutered rabbits are more social and less likely to exhibit aggressive behavioural traits. They are also easier to keep with other neutered rabbits.

Female rabbits have a very high risk of developing ovarian and uterine cancer if they are not spayed. In one study, 60 – 80% of un-neutered female rabbits over the age of 4 years were found to have these cancers.





ARE THERE ANY DISADVANTAGES TO NEUTERING?

Neutering is a surgical procedure and therefore is done under general anaesthesia. In young, fit, healthy animals the risk is minimal. Neutered animals have a reduced metabolic rate and are therefore more prone to putting on weight when fed the same quantity of food. A slight reduction in intake can prevent this. We actively encourage regular weight checks to ensure this problem doesn't occur. A neutered rabbit fed on a diet of grass and hay will not become obese.

WHAT DO I HAVE TO DO BEFORE THE PROCEDURE?

For all neutering procedures, patients are generally hospitalised for one night after the operation. It is important that rabbits are NOT starved prior to admission, and that water is made available at all times.



Common Ailments

SNUFFLES

Snuffles is caused by the Bacteria Pasteurella multocida, which is naturally carried by the rabbit. The illness is caused by damp bedding, stress, low immunity and temperature fluctuations. Symptoms include sneezing, eye and nasal discharge, difficulty breathing and reduced appetite. Transmission to other rabbits can be reduced by improving hygiene, ventilation and avoiding high temperatures. Hutches should be cleaned regularly and only high-quality bedding should be used.

BACK INJURIES

A rabbit is a prey animal and so unless handled regularly will panic when picked up or handled. When stressed, rabbits can panic and may cause themselves a back injury through twisting or kicking their powerful hind legs. Injuries can be exacerbated if the rabbit is suffering from a weakened skeleton, which can be due to mineral deficiencies, reduced exercise and minimal exposure to sunlight. To avoid injury, a rabbit should be handled so that its back is fully supported.

RUNNY EYES (DACRYOCYSTITIS)

Some rabbits can develop runny eyes with a milky discharge that causes conjunctivitis (the inflammation of the lining of the eyelids) or dacryocystitis (the inflammation of the tear ducts). Dacryocystitis can be caused by dental disease and so teeth need to be regularly checked to make sure that they are not causing a problem.

Affected tear ducts may need to be flushed while the rabbit is anaesthetised. Occasionally, teeth may need to be extracted if they are the cause of dacryocystitis.

SORE HOCKS

If rabbits are kept on damp or minimal bedding, their hocks can become sore and occasionally infected. Keeping rabbits on clean bedding will prevent this from developing.

URINE STONES

Rabbits quite commonly have crystals in their urine due to the calcium content of their diet. When there are high levels of calcium crystals in the urine, stones can form and irritate the bladder and cause pain when the rabbit urinates. Stones are confirmed by ultrasound or x-ray, and then removed with surgery. Ensuring the diet is based on grass and hay will help to prevent stones forming.



Fly Strike

Fly Strike happens when flies lay eggs on a rabbit, which then hatch into maggots. Flies such as bluebottles produce maggots that mature very rapidly and are able to eat flesh in less than 24 hours. It is a very common, painful and distressing condition that often results in death.

WHEN WOULD MY RABBIT BE AT RISK?

Fly Strike can occur at any time of year, but is more commonly seen between April and October.

WHAT WOULD PUT MY RABBIT AT RISK?

Any rabbit can get Fly Strike, but the following factors can increase the risks:

- Obesity
- Long hair
- · Abscesses or wounds
- Diarrhoea

- Wet fur
- Dirty or damp living conditions
- Dirty bottoms

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF FLY STRIKE?

Rabbits can either be quiet or very restless, as they are uncomfortable. They may stop eating and drinking.

WHAT DO I DO IF I FIND MAGGOTS?

Call 01793 644422 and you will be seen immediately. Fly Strike is an emergency as rabbits need to have immediate attention. Carefully wipe off any maggots, but do not wet the fur.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR FLY STRIKE?

If Fly Strike is found early enough affected rabbits can make a full recovery. The area is clipped and then all maggots removed. Sometimes this may require sedation or an anaesthetic so that any concealed maggots can be removed, as well as damaged tissue be dealt with. Rabbits will also need pain relief, fluid support and antibiotics to prevent infection. Your vet can recommend a suitable preventative treatment, which when applied to a rabbit prevents Fly Strike for up to ten weeks. Call 01793 644422 for more information.



Dental Care

Dental disease is the most common reason that rabbits are brought to us for treatment.

KEY POINTS

- Dental disease can cause serious illness and pair if not detected.
- We recommend a dental examination twice a year.

In the wild, rabbits spend much of the day eating grass which is high in fibre and of poor nutritional quality. To compensate, rabbits have evolved a system of double digestion which enables them to extract the maximum nutritional value. Fibrous foods are broken down and excreted as soft pale droppings (caecotrophs), which are then eaten again. The waste products of this second passage are hard dark pellets and are discarded.

Adult rabbits have 28 teeth that grow continuously throughout their life to cope with the wear and tear of daily chewing. As the teeth grow and erupt at similar rates, any alteration to one tooth in the level of wear will cause things to go wrong. Calcium and vitamin D, the latter from exposure to sunlight, are essential for healthy teeth and bones. House rabbits are sometimes exposed to insufficient sunlight and this can lead to weakening of their skeleton (osteoporosis) and in particular the jaw which leads to dental disease.

Poor diets can lead to dental disease also. Rabbits fed muesli-type convenience foods are prone to picking out the tasty morsels and discard the healthy but less palatable components leading to obesity. Dental problems involving the front teeth (incisors) include failure to oppose correctly, overgrowth, spiralling or fractures. Problems involving the back or molar teeth include uneven wear, spikes and spurs digging into cheeks and tongue.

Early signs of dental problems are:

- Reduced appetite
- Drooling
- Dirty bottom
- Diarrhoea
- Change in food
- preference or favouring one type of food
- Dropping food or being unable to pick up food properly
- Matted coat as the rabbit is unable to groom properly



Unfortunately, it only takes a spur on the tooth of less than 1mm to cause pain and make the rabbit stop eating. Please bring your rabbit in to see a vet as soon as you notice any of the above symptoms. If you are a member, your Healthy Pet Club Discount will apply to the consultation and the quicker the treatment, the better.

WHAT CAN I DO TO PREVENT DENTAL PROBLEMS?

Feed your rabbit a high-fibre diet.

Provide plenty of hay and grass ideally 90% of the diet as well as access to good quality pellet food. The grinding action that happens when eating hay and grass helps to keep the cheek teeth at the correct length. In extreme cases, teeth can overgrow causing the development of lumps on the lower jaw, abscesses, tear duct and eye infections and unfortunately this often leads to death or euthanasia.



Behaviour & Training

CHEWING

Rabbits are designed for chewing and will chew anything from electrical cabling to curtains. If your rabbit is in the house, you will therefore need to rabbit-proof just as you would for a small child. If your rabbit does chew something that it shouldn't, say its name and a firm 'no' and offer it a distracting toy or something to eat.

DIGGING

Digging is a natural behaviour for rabbits, and rather than being discouraged from digging completely, your rabbit should be encouraged to dig in an appropriate area. Providing them with a box of soil or a child's sandpit (during supervised time outdoors if they are a house rabbit) will allow them to do this in an acceptable way and will prevent your rabbit from destroying your lawn!

TOILET TRAINING

The younger your rabbit is, the easier they are to toilet train, but all rabbits are clean animals and will choose a particular area for their toilet.

If you are toilet training your rabbit, start off by keeping them in a penned-off area where you feel it is acceptable to place a litter tray. The rabbit will stay there for a few days, so make sure it's big enough for the rabbit to move around in and have access to food and water. Line the floor with newspaper and straw and put the litter tray in a corner with some collected droppings or urine-soaked paper. Putting a hay rack above the litter tray is a good idea too, since the rabbit will go to the toilet straight after eating.

Use an absorbent litter (since rabbits will nibble whatever is in their litter tray) and when you clean out the tray, put some used litter back in so that your rabbit will continue to use it as a toilet. Once your rabbit is reliable using the tray, the penned area can be opened out.



Housing & Runs

EXERCISE

In order to keep healthy and avoid bone and back problems, rabbits needs about eight hours of exercise a day and plenty of space. As well as hopping around, they need to be able to stretch fully out and stand up on their hind legs, so choosing the right housing and exercise area is vital.

HUTCHES

Your rabbit's hutch should have two distinct areas – a living area and a sleeping area. The living area should have a wide front made of mesh to allow good air flow, and the smaller sleeping area should have its own door, to make cleaning the hutch easier. The whole hutch should be raised off the ground to prevent rats and mice getting in, and should be waterproofed and have a sloping roof to prevent water seeping in.

Your rabbit's hutch will need to be thoroughly cleaned and dried twice a week.

RUNS

As far as exercise areas go, the bigger the better. A medium-sized rabbit requires a minimum run of 6ft x 4ft x 4ft, and if you have more than one rabbit, the size should be increased accordingly. Rabbits need to be able to jump and to stand up fully on their hind legs, so it's also important that your run is tall enough.

TOYS

As well as having plenty of space to run, hop and stretch, including other things for your rabbit to do whilst in their run will eliminate boredom and give your rabbit plenty of fun! Try plant pots, tunnels, planters of earth for digging, balls, bells and so on, and make sure that you change the toys regularly to maintain your rabbit's interest.



The Wise Pet Care Plan

WHAT IS THE WISE PET CARE PLAN?

Here at the Lawn Veterinary Centre, we believe in preventative care for your pets. So much so, that we have designed the Wise Pet Care Plan to help protect both your pets and your pocket should any illness occur. Used in conjunction with a pet insurance policy (see below), membership of the plan will help you to take an active part in your rabbit's wellbeing and keep them healthy and happy for as many years as possible.

The Wise Pet Care Plan includes:

- Boosters
- Health checks
- · Fly strike products
- · Worm products

as well as discounts on:

- Neutering
- Microchipping
- Dental work
- Food

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Membership of the plan is quick and convenient. By spreading the cost of preventative treatments across the year and paying by monthly Direct Debit, it offers affordability and peace of mind. There is no registration fee and membership can start immediately. To find out more about prices, contact us today.

HOW DO I REGISTER?

To become a member of the Wise Pet Care Plan, just give us a ring on 01793 644422 or pop into the surgery, where our staff can give you more details and answer any questions you may have.



Pet Insurance

KEY POINTS

- Some medical problems can be very expensive to treat.
- The daily cost of insurance is relatively low.
- Tailor your cover to your needs and your means
- Start your insurance early before your pet develops any problems to avoid any exclusions.
- Never cancel or change your policy without speaking to your yet first
- Always read the small print of your policy and seek advice
 if you are unsure about anything it may be too late once
 your pet has an illness or injury.

Here at Lawn Vets, we choose 'cover for life' policies for our pets.

PET INSURANCE

One pet in three will require veterinary treatment this year.

Perhaps this treatment will be a 'one-off' problem like broken bones after a road accident. It may equally be an ongoing problem like diabetes, a skin allergy or arthritis.

Veterinary medicine has become increasingly sophisticated. We are able to diagnose and treat many conditions that a few years ago would have remained undetected, often with fatal consequences.

The advancement of diagnostic testing, medical and surgical treatment, has inevitably led to the cost of first-class veterinary care increasing and in some cases an owner's finance can become a limiting factor.

But it is possible to insure your pet against accident, illness and injury.

Vaccination, elective procedures like neutering, pregnancy, diets, most preventatives (e.g. flea and worming products) and pre-existing conditions are excluded. Some companies offer a pensioner or multi-pet discount. Like your home and car insurance, pet insurance will have an excess whereby you will pay for each condition being treated, and the rest is paid by the insurance. In this way, your pet gets the very best treatment that money can buy. Depending on the policy and the company you choose, it may be possible for us to claim treatment costs directly from the insurance company, but please discuss this first with a member of staff.



Without insurance, owners have to fund the cost of their pet's treatment themselves and if their finances are limited they may have to opt for the second best treatment available for their pet. Pet insurance provides you with peace of mind.

SELECTING A POLICY

It's vital to make sure that you understand the cover you are getting and, even more importantly, what will not be covered.

Three basic types:

- Time-capped Where conditions are only covered for 12 months. These policies are often cheaper, but we don't recommend you take them out. This is because after 12 months, the condition will no longer be covered and you will have to fund further treatment. Please note that taking out a new insurance with a different company won't give you more cover, as the new company will exclude the problem as a pre-existing condition.
- Maximum benefit Where you have an amount specified in your cover that can be spent treating the condition. There are no time restrictions on these types of policy, but once the total amount available has been paid out, the insurance cover stops and you will have to personally fund any further treatment costs. Once again, please note that taking out a new insurance policy with a different company won't give you more cover, as the new company will exclude the problem as a pre-existing condition.
- Cover for life These policies typically provide a specified amount of cover that can be claimed in any year, which is renewed each year along with the policy (remember you will have to pay excess fees each year) and hence your pet is covered for life.

Subject to current legislative restrictions, we can give general advice regarding pet insurance. We would always recommend discussing insurance with us first, since pet insurance companies vary considerably in terms of the ease with which claims are dealt with and we will be well aware of those that are currently good and others who can be more challenging for owners to deal with.

Generally, the best advice is to take out 'cover for life' pet insurance with an appropriate level of cover as soon as you get your rabbit. Choose a reputable company and renew each year, keeping the same policy with the same company. If you change your policy in any way (even with the same company) or if you renew with a different company, then you must remember that any previous conditions or related problems (even if you haven't previously made a claim and including conditions that haven't even been treated), will not be covered by the new policy.



Be aware that some policies will only cover an illness for 12 months before cover stops, while others provide life-long cover for ongoing conditions. Chronic conditions can go on for life, not just for 12 months. Make sure the vet fee is renewed every year and not a fixed amount. Check that there is no limit on how long you can claim for each illness. Finally, check that your rabbit will be covered in later years when they are older.

Leaflets with further information are available in reception.

We recommend combining the Wise Pet Care Plan with an insurance policy to give you absolute peace of mind for all your pet's healthcare needs.





Call us on 01793 644422

