



## Rabbits

*Orctolagus cuniculus*  
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The female rabbit is called a doe and can start reproducing at 4-9 months old. The male rabbit is called a buck and can start reproducing at 6 months old. Litters are usually 4-12 babies and are born in 30-35 days. Baby rabbits are called kits and wean at 4 weeks old. Rabbits can live 10-14 years. The largest breed of rabbit is the Flemish giant at about 17.5lb and the smallest is the Netherlands dwarf at about 2lb. Do not lift rabbits by their ears as the cartilage in their ears can break.

**Diet:** Rabbits should have access to grass hay to eat 24hrs a day. Alfalfa has too much calcium for adult rabbits and can lead to urinary stones. Rabbit pellets are typically alfalfa based and were originally designed for laboratory and meat rabbits: high calorie to cause rapid growth. In pet rabbits, feeding mostly pellet diet can predispose to dental problems, GI problems and urinary stones. Rabbits do not need to be fed any pellets, but may be given 1/4 cup of pellets or less per 5lb of their body weight per day. If you need help converting your rabbit from a pellet diet to grass hay, please talk to your veterinarian. Fresh greens and vegetables make good treats for rabbits, most other things are too high calorie. Carrots contain more sugar than most veggies and should not be given frequently. Just because they like it doesn't mean it is healthy for them! Supplements are not necessary and may be harmful to your pet's health. Rabbits should always have access to fresh water. Make sure to clean sipper bottles out with a pipe-cleaner as they can easily get clogged.

**Housing:** Rabbits can be housed together, but be careful to watch for aggressive behavior. Spayed or neutered rabbits tend to be less territorial and get along better. Giving rabbits appropriate chew toys, untreated wood or cardboard, can help prevent destructive behavior. An exposed wire grate can be part of a rabbit's cage bottom, but not all of it. They need somewhere to stand that is softer on their feet when they want to. Artificial turf, outdoor carpeting, and recycled paper make good rabbit substrates. Wood shavings are often dusty and can make respiratory problems worse. Avoid cedar, walnut and pine bedding as the strong smell and some oils in the wood can be irritating. Rabbits can be trained to use a litter box, but usually only for urination. It is usually

**More on the back!**

easiest to just place the litter box where the rabbit seems to pee most of the time. Once the rabbit starts using the litter box, you can slowly move it to a more convenient place. Avoid wood based litter as rabbits can eat it and get intestinal impactions. Neutering often makes it easier to litter box train rabbits.

**Health care:** Rabbits can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Rabbits need to eat very frequently throughout the day to keep their GI tract healthy. Rabbits that are not eating normally should see a veterinarian as soon as possible. They can die in as little as 3 days without eating. More than 60% of unspayed female rabbits over the age of 3 years develop uterine adenocarcinoma. Neutering and spaying prevents reproductive tumors, and unexpected pregnancies. Rabbits should ideally be spayed or neutered at 15 weeks of age. Rabbits' breath should not smell bad. If it does, this may indicate dental disease. Healthy rabbits only breath through their nose. If your rabbit is keeping its mouth open to breath, see a veterinarian right away.

