

Client Fact Sheet #64

RABBITS

VACCINATIONS

Vaccinations, against Calicivirus, are given to rabbits after they are 12 weeks old. After the 12 week vaccination, annual vaccinations are recommended.

DE-SEXING

Male rabbits can be neutered as soon as the testicles descend (around 3-4 months of age). Some smaller breeds mature earlier and miniature female rabbits can get pregnant from 4 months of age.

Female rabbits can be desexed but this is a more involved procedure so it is more common to ensure that all the males are desexed to avoid unwanted pregnancies.

HEAT STROKE

Rabbits are very susceptible to heat stroke and should not be left in direct sunlight without provision of shade and shelter. Rabbits do need a certain amount of sunlight to provide them with vitamin D.

TRAINING

Rabbits are very social animals and should have companionship either from another rabbit, guinea pig or their owners. Training is a vital part of your rabbit's life. What you do early in their life will shape your rabbits personality and influence how well adapted they are to your family.

Both indoor and outdoor rabbits can be trained to use a litter tray. The best litter is paper pulp or straw, which can be ingested safely.

FEEDING

Rabbits eat **grass**. Daily access to a large lawn run is ideal, but with more rabbits living permanently indoors it is vital that today's rabbit owners understand how to provide suitable alternatives.

The alternatives are;

1. Unlimited good quality fresh hay
2. Grass: daily plucks are better than cut grass which ferments quickly, try growing grass in pots which can be rotated outside as eaten
3. Large selection of greens and vegetables

4. Small amounts of good quality rabbit pellets (not seeds as these are too high in starch)
5. Small amounts of healthy treats eg chunks of carrots, broccoli and apple cores

Young rabbits can be offered food adlib from weaning until growth slows down at 4-6 months. After this adjust the food intake so that the rabbit remains in good condition but not overweight. Obesity is a serious health hazard to rabbits.

If a rabbit stops eating for more than 24 hours or changes its favourite foods, bring it to be examined by a veterinarian, even if he appears otherwise ok. Never change your rabbits diet suddenly. Take at least 1-2 weeks to change over and feed lots of hay during this period. Always make sure that your rabbit has access to food.

We have some books available for your use in our library. We can copy any information you are interested in for you to take home with you.

If you have any questions please ask one of our experienced staff or phone us on 09 818 5697.