

# The Senlac Veterinary Centre

Mount Street, Battle & High Street, Robertsbridge  
Tel 01424 772148

## Should I vaccinate my Rabbit?

All rabbits should be vaccinated against both Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease; both are deadly diseases, easily preventable with a combined annual vaccination.

**Myxomatosis** is carried by rabbit fleas and other biting insects. The plentiful wild rabbits in this area act as a reservoir for disease. Affected animals develop swelling around eyes and base of the ears. They stop eating and become very unwell. The majority of rabbits will die.

**Viral Haemorrhagic Disease** is easily spread by direct contact or carried on bedding, food etc. It kills very rapidly, in 1-2 days, and victims are usually found dead in their hutch.

## Where should my rabbit live?

Rabbits live in sociable groups in the wild, and enjoy the company of another bunny. It is wise to get your rabbit neutered; two or more does (females) or bucks (males) will often fight. Spaying or castrating will often make your rabbit more docile and easier to handle (and prevent your two rapidly becoming twenty...)

Guinea pigs and rabbits do not make good companions; the guinea pig will often be bullied, and they thrive on different diets.

Rabbits need daily handling and attention. Remember that rabbits are a prey species, and their behaviour is very different from a cat or dog. They will tend to hide any problem for as long as they can. Look out for weeping eyes or a wet chin, eating problems, weight gain or a soiled back end.

**Fly strike** is a very unpleasant, frequently fatal condition in which maggots hatch into the dense, dirty fur around a rabbit's tail. Ask us about repellents for these repellent flies; **Xenex Ultra** is a spot-on treatment which will protect rabbits for 2 weeks, whilst **Rear Guard** solution will prevent the hatching of maggots for 2-3 months.

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## What shall I feed my rabbit?

Rabbits' teeth continue to grow throughout their life, at 2-3mm weekly, so a high-fibre diet is important to prevent dental problems.

- 1. Grass** : constant grazing in the wild keeps teeth healthy, provides excellent fibre & nutrients and prevents boredom. Aim for this in your pet rabbit. Harvested grass is acceptable, but don't use grass cuttings from a mower. Avoid weedkillers or others chemicals on the lawn.
- 2. Hay** : plenty of good-quality hay is essential. Timothy or mixed-grass hay is preferable to alfalfa, which contains too much calcium. Alfalfa hay can be fed to rabbits under 1 year (but your bunny may be reluctant to change to other sorts)
- 3. Dried Food** : choose a complete pelleted food such as Burgess Supa Rabbit Excel, which is available from the Surgery ; mixed foods allow rabbits to feed selectively, just picking out their favourite bits! Feed small quantities only; about 3% of your rabbit's bodyweight daily is enough. If you currently exceed this, gradually reduce amounts, substituting with fresh greens & hay.
- 4. Fresh Greens** : These help to provide interest & nutrients. Introduce new foods gradually, but try to give at least three different types a day. If one sort of fresh food makes his stools loose, simply avoid it. Aim to build up to about 2 cups daily.

Try

- Cabbage, broccoli, kale, beet tops, sprouts, spinach
- Pea pods, sugar snap peas
- Dandelions, plantains, clover
- Bramble, raspberry leaves
- Dark lettuce (not iceberg or pale-leafed)
- Green peppers, celery, watercress
- Carrots & carrot tops
- Parsley, basil, peppermint
- Edible flowers (eg marigold, bramble, herbs, primrose, dandelion)

And as special treats only (high in sugar)

- Fruits such as strawberries, apple, pineapple, melon, pear, raspberries, tomato

**5. AVOID** beans, rhubarb, too much cabbage or spinach, sugary or salty snacks, breads or cereals, chocolate or nuts

## Tubby Bunny?

Many pet rabbits are overweight, usually caused by overfeeding of a museli-type diet (high in sugar & low in fibre) and too little exercise. The standard hutch is too small for most rabbits. They also need 4 to 6 hours of

exercise daily, even during the winter; ideally on grass, but in the house or other run as alternatives.

Obesity leads to serious health problems. Rabbits become unable to groom properly, leading to sticky & soiled rear ends. This, in turn, can lead to fly strike. Fat rabbits are prone to heart problems, diabetes and Fatty Liver Syndrome, which is often fatal.

Bring your bunny to the surgery to be weighed.