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*This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.*

## General Information

The domestic rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus domesticus*) is the domesticated form of the European rabbit. Rabbits were first domesticated and used for their food and fur by the Romans. A male rabbit is known as a *buck*, a female as a *doe*, and a young rabbit as a *kit*. Rabbits make great family pets, they can be trained to use a litter box, bond closely with their care-givers and even get the “zoomies” just like cats and dogs!

## Lifespan

The average lifespan for domesticated rabbits is 8-12 years.

## Spaying and Neutering

Female rabbits are at a higher risk of developing uterine cancers than other animals, so it is recommended that they be spayed around 4-6 months of age. Neutering males can help decrease aggression and destructive behaviors, as well as avoiding accidental breeding when housed with females.

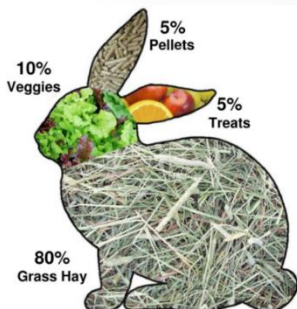
## Housing

Rabbits require a solid bottom cage with a minimum size requirement of four feet long and two feet deep. That space should be doubled if 2 rabbits are housed together, or if you are housing a Flemish giant. Rabbits will chew wood and plastic items so ceramic, or metal dishes are ideal for offering food. Water bowls get very dirty, so water bottles attached to the side of the cage are preferred. Time outside of their enclosure in a bunny-proof area with supervision is great enrichment for them.

When you need to pick up your rabbit, support their hind end and hold them close to your body so they feel more secure. Their powerful kick can fracture their spine if not supported!

## Diet

Rabbits teeth grow continuously throughout their life. Chewing grass hay wears the teeth down to keep them at an appropriate length. Hay also keeps the digestive tract functioning well and prevents obesity and diarrhea. Grass hay (timothy, orchard, oat hay, etc) is necessary to the health of your rabbit and should always be available in unlimited quantity. Alfalfa hay should only be used in rabbits less than a year old or if they're pregnant/nursing due to its higher calcium content. Pellets specifically formulated for rabbits containing **20-25% crude fiber** should be offered a maximum of 1/4 cup per 5 lbs of body weight per day. Avoid mixes with nuts, corn, seeds, and fruit as these are high in fat and sugar. Leafy greens like romaine and red leaf lettuce can be offered as treats as often as once daily. Fruits should be offered very sparingly as they can cause digestive upset.



## Common Medical Conditions

### Dental Disease

- Causes include malocclusions (misalignment of teeth causing pain and difficulty eating) and overgrowth (long teeth that may cause abscesses, infections, or ulcers)
- Chewing problems can result in anorexia or weight loss.
- Symptoms include excessive drooling, difficulty eating, weight loss, dropping food, and squinty/watery eyes due to tooth root abscessation.
- Treatment involves trimming and filing down the overgrown teeth using special tools while under sedation
- Some rabbits will require dental trimmings every 3-6 months if severe malocclusions are present

### GI Stasis

- Refers to sudden disruption of GI motility and has many possible causes
- If your rabbit does not eat or have regular bowel movements in over 12-24 hours, contact your vet immediately as GI stasis can quickly become a life-threatening emergency

### Upper respiratory infections

- Signs include sneezing, nasal discharge, eye discharge and sometimes increased respiratory effort
- Some infections may persist despite antibiotic therapy, and bacterial or fungal cultures may be warranted

### Ectoparasites

- Fleas, lice, and fur/ear mites are a common problem in rabbits
- Revolution or Advantage topicals can be applied monthly to prevent external parasites. NEVER use Frontline (or any product containing fipronil) as it can cause seizures and even death.

## References

*Animal Hospital in Centennial, CO.* Aurora Animal Hospital. (n.d.). <https://www.auroraanimalhospital.com/>

*For Exotic Animal Veterinary Medicine Professionals.* LafeberVet. (2025, April 25). <https://lafeber.com/vet/>

