



POCKET PET CARE



Rabbit Care

Rabbits have sensitive temperaments and are easily frightened and stressed by unfamiliar noise or animals and people in their surroundings. They can die from fright and are reliant on their carers to keep them safe and stress free. They see in shapes and will only see a shape approach them. It is important to talk to your bunny so that they recognise your voice as you approach them. The more the bunny is around you the more they will recognise and become used to your voice. They mistrust humans if scared and their only defence is to bite to protect themselves. A child poking fingers into the bunny enclosure will also alarm the bunny.

Rabbits, with human interaction, are affectionate pets. Bunnies learn to trust and will bond with humans the more interaction you have with them. They like routine and will let you know when it is dinnertime.

Rabbits have sensitive health needs. As a prey animal, rabbits hide illness and it is important to know their habits and what is normal for them. This is evident in disinterest in food, no droppings and sitting quietly hunched and not interested in playing or exploring. Any of these symptoms can result in your bunny dying if not taken to a vet.

Rabbits must be protected from mosquitoes and are prone to contracting the calici and myxomatosis virus carried by mosquitoes and other insects. The government has released a new strain of myxomatosis to control wild rabbit populations and there is no vaccine available for pet rabbits. Bunnies can be vaccinated against the calici virus.

Rabbits can die in the heat and cold. Bunnies do not have sweat glands and do not perspire. Temperatures above 25 degrees can be fatal. Alternatively exposure to wind and rain can also be detrimental. Bunnies should not be left in direct sun. In their natural state they would retreat into cool burrows in the heat of the day.

Rabbits can be litter trained and are clean animals, they use their litter trays more and more once they are desexed. Desexing protects the girls from uterine cancers, which has an 80% mortality rate and calms the aggressive and anti-social behaviours in both sexes that results from puberty.

Rabbits are social animals. The more that you interact with your bunny the more they will learn to trust you and become inquisitive and affectionate and interactive. Some rabbits will get along, but others may not. Unfamiliar rabbits should never be left alone together. Care should be taken when allowing rabbits to mix with dogs and cats, in order to avoid injury.

Rabbits are affective, inquisitive and interactive family pets in response to human kindness. The bunny is a barometer of how much quality time you spend with your pet; for instance when you allow your pet to spend



a lot of time around you they will be tame and interactive. If your pet is isolated they will become depressed, withdrawn and afraid of you. They can attack and bite if you enter their space.

Keeping Your Rabbit Entertained

Like dogs and cats, rabbits need to be kept active and entertained. Rabbits should ideally be let out to roam and exercise for several hours a day, under supervision. Areas with free-roaming access should be 'rabbit-proofed'. Rabbits love to throw things around, run madly around the room and really love to chew on things. Some ideas for toys include:

- Cardboard boxes
- Toilet rolls stuffed with hay
- Large paper bags
- Dried out pinecones
- Baskets
- Tunnels – e.g. cat tunnel
- Sturdy wooden logs to jump on



A happy rabbit will often do 'Binkies' where they will run along and kick their legs out to one side, just for the joy of it!

Health Care

Vaccinations

There are two main viruses which affect pet rabbits; Myxomatosis and Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (Calciivirus). Vaccination is only available for Calciivirus in Australia and is recommended from 12 weeks of age and then yearly for life. The risk of your rabbit get Myxomatosis is reduced by having indoor rabbits and trying to keep mosquitos (which transmit the virus) away from them.

Desexing

All rabbits should be desexed. This helps to stop unwanted baby bunnies, but also helps with behavioural problems and stops some cancers in female rabbits. Bunnies are much happier with friends and a bonded pair of desexed rabbits are a delight to see spending time playing and grooming each other. Desexing can be done from 4 months for male rabbits and five-seven months for female rabbits.

When to visit the vet

It is very important for your rabbit to see a vet if he/she:

- Requires annual vaccination
- Stops or slows down eating
- Has any obvious injury
- Has difficulty breathing
- Has any lumps on its face or jaw
- Has swollen or runny eyes
- Is unwell in any other way

