

Pet Insurance

We believe insurance for pets is a very good idea, as it takes away the financial worries when considering the best treatment for your pet. We cannot recommend specific policies, but can discuss with you the types of pet insurance that are available.

The Animal Welfare Act

This is a new law which came into force in April 2007 in England. It includes a new 'welfare offence' which means that the owner of a pet is legally required to care for their pet properly. This includes providing appropriate food, water and housing, allowing expression of normal behaviour and providing treatment for any illness or injury. It is important to remember most pet owners will not need to change the way they care for their animals to comply with the new law – most people already provide for their pets needs. The RSPCA website has more information if required.



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Veterinary Advice for Rabbit Owners



Congratulations on the arrival of your new rabbit. At Croft Veterinary Centre, your pet is in the very best hands.

Socialisation

Rabbits are social animals and should ideally be kept in pairs. Rabbits from different litters should be introduced to each other immediately post weaning if possible at 3-4 weeks of age. Otherwise, it is sensible to purchase young rabbits as a bonded pair. It is advisable to neuter both male and female rabbits to prevent dominance and sexual behaviour.

Vaccination

Rabbits should be vaccinated against the following diseases:

1. Myxomatosis – this is usually a fatal disease which can affect any rabbit including house rabbits. It is transmitted by fleas and midges rather than by direct contact with an infected rabbit.
2. Viral Haemorrhagic Disease – this is a fatal disease which causes sudden death in otherwise healthy rabbits.

A single vaccination given once a year can protect against both of these diseases. It can be given from 5 weeks of age.

Diet

Correct nutrition is extremely important. A lot of health problems, for example dental disease, are due to an inappropriate diet.

Rabbits should be fed the following foods:



1. Hay and grass – should make up at least 70% of the diet. Very good quality hay must be fed as it contains more nutrients and is more palatable than poor quality hay.
2. Vegetables and herbs – should make up approximately 25%-28% of the diet. Vegetables such as cabbage, kale, broccoli, cauliflower leaves and sprouts are ideal. Root vegetables such as carrots and parsnips, and fruits should be avoided or only fed very occasionally in small quantities. Herbs such as mint, parsley and coriander can be fed ad lib.
3. Pelleted feed – should make up only 2%-5% of the diet in most rabbits. Large or giant breed rabbits may require a greater proportion in order to maintain their body weight. Muesli type rabbit mixes should be avoided entirely.

Rabbits produce two types of faecal pellets – caecotrophs and true faeces. Caecotrophs are soft, mucous covered pellets which the rabbit will eat. They contain vitamins, proteins and bacteria. Eating caecotrophs is a normal and essential part of a rabbit's nutrition. True faeces are firm, dry, round pellets. Rabbits normally pass these in very large quantities.



Housing

Rabbits are traditionally kept outside in hutches. Hutches should be placed in a draught free area and attached to a run to allow grazing and exercise.

Substrates such as straw, wood shavings and newspaper can be used

for bedding. Bedding should be changed as soon as it is soiled, usually daily. Rabbits can be litter trained to use a particular area of the hutch as a latrine, which can aid in keeping the hutch clean.

Rabbits can be kept indoors as house rabbits. House rabbits should not be exposed to temperatures greater than 20 degrees centigrade as they are very prone to heat stress.

Neutering

Most rabbits reach sexual maturity between 3 and 6 months of age, but this varies with breed. At the Croft Veterinary Centre we recommend neutering all rabbits that will not be used for breeding purposes for the following reasons:

1. In does neutering will reduce dominance behaviour and aggression directed towards other rabbits and people.
2. In does it prevents the development of uterine adenocarcinoma (a malignant tumour of the uterus) which is common in does over 3 years of age.
3. In bucks neutering will reduce sexual behaviour and aggression directed towards rabbits or people, and reduce urine spraying behaviour.

We can generally neuter rabbits from 3 months old depending on their size and weight. Very small rabbits we would probably delay till they are older and bigger.

Fly Strike

Rabbits that are unable to groom themselves often have faeces and urine matted around their back ends. These rabbits are at risk of developing fly strike. Fly strike occurs when flies, which are attracted to the faeces, lay eggs on the rabbit usually around their bottom. The larvae hatching from the eggs will burrow into the rabbit causing damage to the soft tissue around the bottom. This is extremely painful, some rabbits will die due to shock. The risk of fly strike can be reduced by keeping your rabbit and its hutch clean and applying a fly repellent such as Rearguard. Rabbits that do develop matting around the back end often have underlying health problems such as spinal disease, and may require further investigation.