

# Rabbit Care Guide

Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital

## HOUSING

### Cage:

- Avoid wire bottom cages as these can cause injuries and pressure sores
- Minimum of 2x3 feet for small breeds and 3x4 for large breeds

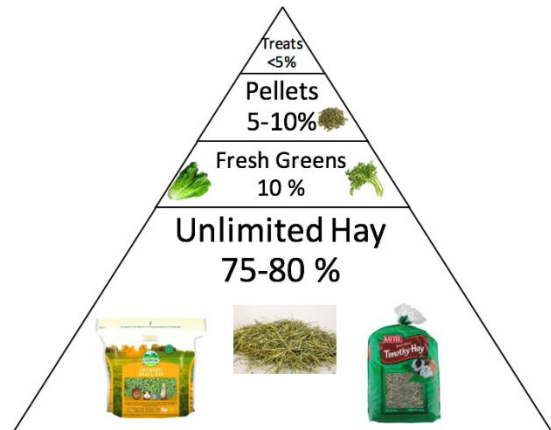
### Bedding/litter:

- Always use unscented bedding and avoid cedar and pine shavings – strongly smelling bedding can cause irritation to the nose and lungs and contribute to respiratory disease
- CareFresh or recycled newspaper beddings (eg Yesterday's News) are recommended as they are good absorbable unscented materials
- Always have a litter box available
- Ensure to clean the bedding regularly, spot clean the bedding/litter box daily and change all the bedding 1-2 times a week



## NUTRITION

- Always have fresh water and hay available
- 75-80% of the diet should be good quality hay as this helps regulate their digestive system and helps prevent dental diseases
- Ensure hay is always readily available
- Timothy hay is recommended however other alternatives include botanical and oat hays if your rabbit won't eat timothy hay
- If you are having difficulties encouraging your rabbit to eat enough hay contact your veterinarian to discuss tips and tricks to help
- Avoid alfalfa hay once your rabbit is an adult as it has a high calcium content that can contribute to the formation of calcium stones within the urinary system
- Always ensure your hay is fresh and free from mold



## PELLETS

- Rabbit pellets provide a balance of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients
- Avoid pellets that are sold as "mixes" containing seeds, fruits or nuts – your rabbit may pick out their favorite food and often not obtain the balanced diet they need. They can also be too high in fats leading to excessive weight gain
- Use a timothy hay-based pellet
- As a guide feed 1/8th to 1/4 cup of pellets once per day for an average sized adult rabbit. Please discuss specific requirements for your rabbit's exact needs with your veterinarian

## FRESH PRODUCE

- Introduce vegetables slowly and one at a time to your rabbit to prevent diarrhea
- Avoid dark leafy green vegetables as these are high in calcium which can lead to bladder stones. This includes dandelion greens, collard greens, turnip greens, kale, spinach and parsley
- 1-2 cups of fresh greens such as romaine lettuce, red/green leaf lettuce, arugula, and watercress can be offered daily
- Offer small pieces of fruits and other vegetables such as bell peppers or carrots as occasional treats

## BEHAVIOR

- Allow your rabbit daily exercise and playtime out of the cage
- Rabbits like to chew and can often be found chewing on household items such as furniture or electrical wires. Supervise closely any out of cage playtime or 'bunny proof' rooms to help keep your rabbit safe from hazardous items
- Provide your rabbit with plenty of attention and toys. Examples of safe toys include cardboard boxes stuffed with hay or straw, tunnels made from open-ended cardboard boxes or cat tunnels and items your rabbit can nudge and roll such as empty Quaker Oat boxes
- Rabbits can be housed in pairs if carefully bonded together. However not all rabbits will get along and many rescue organizations will allow you to bring your rabbit to meet with potential new cage mates to assess compatibility



## HEALTH CARE

- Rabbits by nature hide symptoms and signs of illnesses making early detection of disease difficult
- New patient exams and yearly examinations are therefore strongly recommended to help your rabbit live a long and happy life
- From 4 years of age annual bloodwork is also recommended to detect the earliest onset of disease
- Spaying and neutering of rabbits is recommended for health and welfare benefits
- Approximately 80% of intact female rabbits are reported to have cancer of the reproductive tract by the age of 3 years old. Having your rabbit spayed at an early age significantly reduces this risk
- If you notice any changes to your rabbit's behavior, appetite or bowel movements we would recommend contacting your veterinarian immediately

