

## PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

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Common health problems in rabbits include:

- **Hairballs.** Prevent these with regular brushing and a high-fiber diet with unlimited timothy hay. Surgery may be necessary if they cause gut blockage.
- **Overgrown teeth.** Feeding rabbits a high-fiber diet allows them to grind down their teeth to a usable length. If the teeth grow too long, they cause pain and prevent rabbits from eating. See a vet immediately if this is the case.
- **Overgrown nails.** Nails should be trimmed every 3–4 weeks.
- **“Snuffles.”** This is a bacterial infection most often affecting the eyes (discharge, redness) or nose (discharge, sneezing). Treatment requires antibiotics. See a vet immediately.

Vet visits every 6–12 months are recommended, as well as a routine checkup after adopting your rabbit. **Spaying** female rabbits at 4–6 months of age is recommended, and **neutering** male rabbits decreases aggressive behavior.

Visit a vet immediately if your rabbit has reduced appetite, diarrhea, no feces, drooling, bloating, lethargy or difficulty urinating.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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For more comprehensive information on rabbit care, visit:

- [rabbit.org](http://rabbit.org)
- [myhouserabbit.com](http://myhouserabbit.com)
- [rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits](http://rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits)
- [seavs.com](http://seavs.com)

### Area Vets

Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services  
4015 Rust Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(703) 491-1111

Pender Veterinary Clinic  
4001 Legato Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22033  
(703) 654-3100

Paws, Purrs & Exotics  
5838-A North Kings Highway  
Alexandria, VA 22303  
(703) 549-7297

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[tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9](http://tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9)

### Animal Welfare League of Arlington

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2650 Arlington Mill Dr.  
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: 703-931-9241  
[www.awla.org](http://www.awla.org)  
[mail@awla.org](mailto:mail@awla.org)

## CARING FOR RABBITS

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### A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE





## DIET

### Food

- Timothy hay should be available in your rabbit's cage at all times and comprise 75–80% of its diet. Orchard grass, oat hay and meadow grass are acceptable alternatives.
- Timothy hay-based pellets are an optional supplement to hay. Recommended daily amount varies depending on your rabbit's weight.
- Rabbits should be fed about one cup of leafy green vegetables per 2 pounds of body weight each day. Suitable greens include romaine lettuce, red or green lettuce, carrot tops, kale, bok choy, endive and turnip greens.

**Do not** feed rabbits yogurt drops, nuts, seeds, or vegetables high in calcium. Alfalfa hay should not be fed to rabbits over 6 months old.

### Water

- Provide in a bottle or spill-proof water bowl. Change water daily.

## HOUSING

### Caging

- Cages should be a minimum of 12 square feet, depending on your rabbit's size. An additional exercise space should be provided. Rabbits should spend at least **5 hours** of their day in this exercise space or a comparable safe, enclosed exercise area.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.
- Be sure to “bunny proof” your house before letting a rabbit explore. Keep harmful products out of reach and prevent rabbits from chewing on objects such as power cords.
- In this climate, **rabbits should be kept indoors**. They are susceptible to overheating at temperatures above 85°F.

### Environment

Rabbit cages should contain:

- A litter box containing a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh. Encourage your rabbit to use it by placing it where they most often eliminate. Remove waste daily.
- Safe materials, such as non-toxic cardboard, untreated wood or commercially available chew toys, to encourage natural chewing behavior and prevent dental disease.
- Other commercially available toys or food-stuffed objects. Toys should be regularly rearranged throughout the cage to promote mental stimulation.
- Unlimited access to water and hay.

### Bedding

- Cages should be lined with a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Do not use wood shavings or cat litter.
- Bedding should be spot cleaned daily and changed weekly.

## GENERAL CARE

- Rabbits should be either housed separately or paired with a **bonded mate**.
- Rabbits should generally be left in an enclosure when unsupervised.
- Rabbits spending time outdoors should do so in a safe enclosure and be under constant supervision. Keep them away from grass that has been treated with pesticides or chemicals.
- Rabbits shed heavily about every three months. They should be brushed at least weekly to prevent hairballs.

### Behavior

- Rabbits are crepuscular; they sleep during the day and night, and are most active at dawn and twilight.
- Rabbits sometimes communicate through vocalizations. Grunting/growling indicates anger, squealing indicates pain or distress and clicking or “buzzing” of the teeth indicates happiness and contentment.

