

Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

Holly G. Carter, BVetMed

12930 NE 125h Way, Ste B130, Kirkland, WA 98034

Ph: 425-821-6165 Fax: 425-821-6130

info@evergreenae.com

www.exopet.com

Pet Rabbits

-Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM



Behavior

Rabbits are by quiet with engaging personalities. They are most active in the morning and at dusk, although most pet rabbits adapt well to our schedules. They are generally affectionate, playful and bond well with their owners. They are highly intelligent and need attention and environmental stimulus to keep them active. They are social animals and do well in households with multiple rabbits. The solitary rabbit needs to have a lot of human companionship. Although normally they are not aggressive, hostile behaviors may be seen when the rabbit is frightened, in pain, or expressing territoriality or is irritated with its owner. An irritated rabbit may seethe (sounds) and may thump one of its hind feet in an act of defiance. They usually turn their backs to you when doing this.

Housing

Wire cages are preferable over aquariums, as they provide better ventilation, preventing the buildup of ammonia levels due to the large amount of urine excreted. Cages need to have narrow wire spacing on the floor to prevent foot injuries; however, it is preferable to house rabbits in caging with solid flooring. Floor space should be at least 3 times the stretched out length of the rabbit's adult size. A nesting type box or bedding of toweling is utilized. There are a number of commercial rabbit beds that work well. Exercise pens can be made using baby gates or standing puppy exercise pens. When the rabbit is out of its home cage, care must be taken to be sure all electrical wires and other furnishings are out of reach. Recycled newspaper products as fibers or pellets work well in litter boxes. The litter box should be large enough for the rabbit to totally sit in. There are many commercial products for rabbit safe housing, including toys. A bored rabbit can be a destructive rabbit. The best toys include papertowel/toilet paper rolls, untreated cardboard boxes, vegetables hidden in hay, pellets hidden in hay or commercial toys for rabbits.

Diet

The basic diet for rabbits is hay. Alfalfa pellets may make up to 50% of baby bunny's diet going down to timothy pellets at approximately 25% of an adult rabbit's diet (1/4 cup per 5 lbs body weight). Fresh, leafy greens can be offered daily, approximately 1/2-1 cup per 5 lbs body weight. Hay is unlimited, and can be timothy, orchard, oat

grass, meadow, or brome. High fiber fruits can be given as a treat (no more than 1 tablespoon or less per 5 lbs body weight). Fresh water should be available always

Acceptable vegetables: collard greens, endive, dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides or fertilizer exposure), mustard greens, parsley, snow peas, romaine lettuce (no iceberg lettuce), red or green leaf lettuce, watercress, basil, bok choy, broccoli (mostly stems and leaves), cilantro, clover, escarole, radicchio, and beet, carrot and radish tops. Use spinach, kale, and cabbage and other vegetables high in oxalates fed only occasionally.

Acceptable fruits: apples, blueberries, melon, papaya and strawberries

To Spay or Neuter

There are both medical and behavioral reasons to have rabbits spayed or neutered. A neutered male rabbit is less territorial and marks less with urine and feces. He will fight less with other rabbits. Unspayed female rabbits tend to be more territorial and may become somewhat aggressive every towards their owners during estrus (in heat). Unspayed females over the age of 4 years have an extremely high rate of reproductive and mammary cancers.

Preferably rabbits should be altered with they are 4-6 months old, but a healthy rabbit can be done at any time.

Grooming and Restraint

Most rabbits need to be brushed regularly, using a soft brush sold for kittens. Angora breeds need daily comb and brushing. Most rabbits need their nails trimmed as they can become long for digging and quite sharp. The rabbit should be restrained properly and safely to do this. Water or water-based gel can be applied to the feet to get the hair back from the nail, making it less likely to hit the quick (will bleed) or pull the hair, both of which can be momentarily painful for the rabbit. It is a good idea to have a hemostatic agent such as Kwik Stop on hand in case the quick is hit.

For restraint it is imperative that the rabbit cannot kick backwards as this may injure the back. A towel or bath mat should always be placed on a table for any handling to give the rabbit good footing. The rabbit may be gently lifted by scooping the rear end with one hand while grasping behind the front legs with the other hand, and placing the rabbit's back against you. The scruff alone or the ears should never be used. Covering the eyes and head with a towel may soothe an anxious rabbit. One way to carry a rabbit is to have the rabbit's head tucked into the handler's arm and the handler's forearms are used to provide support both along the back and beneath the rabbit's body.