



## RABBIT LIFESPAN, HEALTH, COMMON ILLNESSES, AND VET CARE

### Lifespan

The average lifespan of a house rabbit receiving quality care is 8 to 12 years of age! In their elder years, rabbits will have special dietary needs and may need more specialized care than when they were young.

### Health

The quality of a rabbit's health is based upon a number of things, including, but not limited to, bedding, temperature, nutrition, vet care, enrichment and exercise. These topics will be covered in more detail in separate handouts.

### Common Illnesses

Though rabbits are susceptible to many different illnesses, diseases, disorders, etc., these are specific and common illnesses about which a rabbit owner must be most aware.

- **Overgrown Teeth:** A rabbit's teeth continually grow throughout its life. If a rabbit is not constantly grinding their teeth down by eating fiber, you will start to see their molar teeth become sharp spikes, often damaging their cheeks and tongue. The pain caused from this makes them either reluctant or not able to eat. Once a rabbit stops eating their gut stops working which can result in death.
- **Stasis:** A condition in which the rabbit's intestinal tract stops working. It can be caused by stress, other illness or pain, intestinal blockage or lack of crude fiber in the diet. Stasis presents itself through small, or the absence of, fecal pellets and/or fecal pellets covered in a mucous like casing. It can cause a great deal of pain and should be treated as an emergency.
- **Snuffles:** aka Pasteurellosis. This highly contagious (between rabbits) bacterium can cause redness, discharge and squinting of the eyes and/or sneezing or discharge from the nose. It can also affect the ears (resulting in a head tilt), cause abscesses and even uterine infections. A course of antibiotics will usually resolve this bacterial infection.
- **Hairballs:** Just like cats, rabbits are self groomers. Unlike cats, however, rabbits cannot vomit, so the hair must be able to move through the gut. If this doesn't happen, an obstruction can occur and serious complications are often not far behind. Symptoms include lethargy and loss of appetite, or they will stop eating altogether. A diet high in fiber will help in reducing hairballs. There are medications that can be used to get the gut functioning normally again, but surgery is also an option.

The following behaviors may be considered signs of illness or stress (that can lead to illness):

- Hiding
- Chewing cage bars
- Over-grooming
- Altered feeding habits
- Different toilet habits
- Over-drinking

- Sitting hunched
- A reluctance to move
- Repeated circling

### **Veterinary Care**

Rabbits do not receive vaccines or treatments like dogs and cats do, so it is rare for there to be a serious need for frequent vet visits unless the rabbit is showing signs of illness. A single “well visit” to the vet each year is all that is recommended. However, if you notice that your rabbit is not eating or drinking normally, has reduced fecal pellets, very loose stool or diarrhea, or is just “not right”, you will want to have a veterinarian who routinely sees rabbits or an exotic veterinarian determine if something serious is going on. Seek “word-of-mouth” recommendations/referrals from other rabbit enthusiasts in your area.