

# Bunny Care Information

Bunnies are amazing pets, but they do have specific requirements in order to live a long & healthy life.

## First few days

During the first few days, your new furry family member may be timid and frightened so it's important to house your bunny in a quiet/calm area. Make sure to keep your other pets (if any) away from your bunny during this time to reduce stress. Bunnies are prey animals so it's best to allow space until fully acquainted. Babies will be scared & confused so it is normal if your bunny is hiding and avoiding being held. Give them time to warm up to you to result in a lifelong companion!

## Housing

There are several housing options/setups that will work for your bunny. They can be contained in a dog pen, bunny condo, or even free roam in the house. If contained, their space should be big enough for them to hop around and binky. They should always be let out for additional exercise at least 1-2 hours a day. Make sure they will not be isolated away from you or your family, as they are very sociable pets. We advise you to not house your bunny outside, as they are prey animals and very sensitive to the elements from outdoors. Bunnies prefer cooler weather, especially the wooly breeds. We recommend housing your bunny between 40-70 degrees. Even though rabbits may survive in below freezing temps, water bowls & bottles may solidify.

## Bonding

If you have another bunny at home or planning on another in the future, the spay/neuter procedure is key for successful bonding. If you take home 2 or more babies from the same litter, they will need to be rebonded once they are fixed. The "Baby Bond" is not a lifelong bond, meaning the kits that were raised together will eventually break their bond once they mature due to hormones and territorial instincts. Always introduce new bunnies in a neutral environment to avoid aggression. This process may take time. Multiple cages may be required for this process. We recommend housing the cages side by side but far enough where no fighting between bars can occur.

## **Diet**

A bunny's diet should consist of unlimited timothy hay, limited pellets, and fresh water. Occasional greens once they reach 6 months.

### HAY

Hay makes up almost 85-90% of a bunny's diet. It's important to keep your bunny healthy as it maintains digestion, trims down teeth, reduces unwanted chewing, and much more. Hay is high in fiber which is essential to keep your fur baby healthy. However, timothy hay is a very common allergy among most individuals. Other hay alternatives include oat hay, meadow hay, orchard grass, bermuda grass, & coastal hay. We don't recommend feeding your bunny alfalfa hay as its very high levels of protein, calcium, & fat. This can cause health issues which can affect the bladder and kidneys.

### PELLETS

We highly recommend switching over to the Oxbow Adult rabbit feed. This can be purchased at any pet store, feed store, Chewy, & Amazon. Pellets only make up 10% of a bunny's diet. They are an extra source of nutrients that hay alone may not provide. Your bunny will go home with a week's supply of the feed they are currently eating. Babies have very delicate digestive systems so it is important to gradually introduce a new pellet. Mix the old & new pellets together until they eventually are weaned from the old pellets.

- Under 6 months- ½ cup pellets twice daily
- Over 6 months- ¼ cup pellets twice daily

### Fruits/Veggies

Must be at least 6 months or older until you can gradually introduce veggies and fruits.

- Leafy Greens- Parsley, spinach, mustard greens, mint, basil, watercress, cilantro, carrot tops, radicchio, fennel, dill leaves, beet greens, swiss chard, radish tops, sprouts, arugula, cucumber leaves, endive, kale, red & green lettuce (NO ICEBERG!), romaine lettuce, spring greens, turnip greens, dandelion greens.
- Non Leafy Vegetables (Use in moderation)- Carrots, zucchini squash, summer squash, broccolini, celery, broccoli, bell peppers, edible flowers, brussel sprouts, cabbage, mushrooms.

- Fruits (Use in moderation)- Cherries, pear, apple, peach, plum, nectarine, currants, apricots, berries, papaya, kiwi, mango, pineapple(remove skin), bananas(remove skin), melon(skin & seeds included), star fruit.

### **Litter Training**

Rabbits have a natural instinct to poop/urinate in one area. This is usually a corner. Take advantage of this by setting up a large rabbit litter pan or cat litter box in that area. Always keep food, water, and hay close to the area to help with the training process. Put a layer of rabbit safe litter such as paper based pellets or kiln dried pine at the bottom of the box. Do NOT use clumping clay cat litter or pine shavings, as they are not safe for rabbits. We like to put a handful of hay on top of the litter as they like to eat at the same time.

### **Enrichment**

Bunnies do get bored easily. Not only do they need space to exercise, they also need mental stimulation. You can provide this by giving them a variety of rabbit safe toys such as rabbit chews, baby stacking cups, as well as dog brain toys/boards that hide treats. Cardboard boxes also are amazing as well. You can DIY your own cardboard tunnels, obstacle courses, and castles which will keep your rabbit busy. Yes, they will destroy them eventually as they love to chew.

### **Grooming**

Luckily, Holland lops, Mini Plush lops, and English lops don't require the most grooming, as they don't have long fur. Occasional brushing during the molting season will help with the shedding. However, Teddywidders are required to be groomed DAILY! If not groomed, they will get so matted where they are unable to move, see, & eat. Blow dryers, scissors, and brushes are required if owning a teddy. Regular nail clipping every 1-2 months is required for all breeds as long nails will get snagged on things and curl under into your rabbit's paw. It also saves you from scratches as they will scratch. You can either clip them yourself (avoid the quick) with regular human nail clippers or small animal nail clippers. Both work fine. For beginners, it may be a 2 person job. Otherwise you may find a rabbit vet or groomer who can do them for you. We offer free nail trimmings if adopted one of our bunnies. Rabbits are naturally clean animals and wash themselves frequently. NEVER bathe your bunny, as this is very

dangerous. If they do have yellow stains on their feet/bottom, it's okay to give them a “butt bath.” Another option is using baby wet wipes or cornstarch to clean the area.

## **First Aid Kits**

These items are highly recommended to keep on hand. These items will NOT replace veterinary care.

- Latex Gloves/Hand Sanitizer- Prevent the spread of germs.
- Tweezers, Gauze Pads, Q-Tips- Cleaning & bandaging wounds.
- Syringes- Administering medications.
- Cornstarch or Styptic Powder- If cutting the quick of the nail, it will bleed. Dip the nail in the powder to stop the bleeding.
- Vetericyn Spray- Is an antibacterial spray used to clean minor cuts/wounds & infections.
- Critical Care- Is used when your bunny happens to stop eating/drinking. Mix the powder with water and feed with a syringe as directed.
- Probios- This supplement supports the digestive system. Will help restore the digestive balance if they have an upset tummy.
- Mineral/Olive Oil- In case of ear mites, gently administer the oil inside the ears and behind the neck.
- Saline- To wash eyes in case of infection.
- Hydrogen Peroxide- May be diluted with water to treat minor cuts & wounds.
- Neosporin- Only use the one without pain killers as it may have negative side effects on rabbits. This is best for cuts & wounds to fight infections.
- Infant Gas Drops- Resolves minor gas issues such as bloat.
- Papaya Tablets- Helps push everything through the digestive tract. Helps with hairballs.

## **Rabbit Savvy Vets**

Rabbits are prey animals, so their natural instinct is to hide any signs of illness. You must keep a watchful eye to ensure your rabbit is eating, drinking, pooping, and urinating regularly. If you notice any change in behavior, it is important to call a vet who specializes in rabbits immediately. Annual checkups are recommended as well. Listed below are several Texas rabbit savvy vets.

- Amarillo- Noah's Ark Pet Hospital
- Austin- Austin Animal and Bird Clinic
- Boerne- Herbst Veterinary Hospital PC
- Byron- Kingdom Animal Hospital
- College Station- All Pets Veterinary Medical Center
- Cypress- Cypress Vet Clinic
- El Paso- Mesa Vet Clinic
- Frisco- Family Friends Vet Hospital
- Grapevine- Texas Avian and Exotic
- Houston- Gulf Coast Vet Specialists
- Keller- All Creatures Vet Clinic
- Killeen- Killeen Vet Clinic
- Lubbock- Live Oak Animal Hospital
- New Braunfels- Fischer Vet Clinic
- Pflugerville- White Rock Vet
- San Marcos- Williams-Sebby Veterinary Clinic
- San Antonio- Northern Oaks Bird and Animal Hospital

### **Supply Checklist**

- Indoor/Outdoor Housing- Get a rabbit cage, hutch, or a dog pen that is 4 ft or higher.
- Cage Bedding- if litter box training, you can use vinyl flooring or fleece blankets as the bedding.
- Litter Box- A large rectangle rabbit litter pan or large cat litter box. Do not use small corner litter pans.
- Litter- Rabbit safe litter includes paper based pellets or kiln dried pine. No clumping clay litter or shavings.
- Food/Water Bowls- Ceramic dishes are heavy enough so that your bunny cant tip them over. Hanging feeders and bowls are also efficient as well.
- Hay Feeder- This helps keep hay fresh and available to your bunny at all times.
- Chew Toys- wood chews, woven hay mats, and cardboard are all safe for rabbits.
- Nail Clippers- Needs to be cut regularly. If your bunny has dark/black nails, use a flashlight to help locate the quick and avoid it.

- Brush- A wire cat brush will work for your bunny.
- First Aid Kit- Bunnies are pros at hiding illnesses/injuries as they are prey animals. It's best to keep a first aid kit on hand in case of emergencies.

## **Bunny Language & Behavior**

Pet rabbits are different from cats and dogs. It is essential to understand how rabbits think so you and your rabbit can live a happy life together. By understanding your rabbit's natural inclinations, you can build a trusting and fulfilling relationship with your bunny.

- Binkying - Many that are unfamiliar to pet rabbits may not know that bunnies have a very dramatic way of expressing excitement and joy. They love to dance, leap in the air, twisting and kicking their feet out. They always need a running start.
- The Bunny 500 - When rabbits zip around the room in a blur. Their burst of speed also demonstrates excitement.
- Flopping - A bunny at ease will usually flop to their side dramatically. This means that they are happy and feel safe. Be careful as they do try to scare you as they “play dead.”
- Licking - Bunnies show affection by licking or grooming. You'll see a pair of rabbits grooming each other, which signifies that they have a strong bond.
- Buzzing/Honking - An excited rabbit may make a honking or buzzing sound while circling. This signifies happiness, or with another rabbit may lead to sexual excitement.
- Purring/Teeth Grinding - Bunnies sometimes show their enjoyment if you're petting them by grinding their teeth. This is a rabbit's way of purring. Teeth grinding could also signify discomfort and pain. You will be able to tell the difference as they may grind louder than normal.
- Growling - Grunting or growling is a sign your rabbit is angry or stressed. You may be invading their territory, and they are telling you to back off.
- Screaming - Rabbits generally only scream when they are dieing or in extreme pain. Seek veterinary assistance if this occurs.
- Kicking “Dirt” Up - Displeased rabbits may deliberately kick their feet up as they hop away from you. In a wild setting, this translates to kicking dirt into another animal's face.

- Chinning - A rabbit's way of saying "Mine." They rub their chin, which has special scent glands, on objects to mark their territory.
- Nose Bonking/Nudging - Rabbits explore their environments by sniffing and nudging. It may be a greeting to their first line of investigation. But nudging can also indicate a level of bossiness. Your rabbits might be telling you "You're in my way." They may also be trying to get your attention because you're not petting them. If the nudge is ignored, they might follow with a nip.
- Digging - on your legs or feet is another way rabbits try to get your attention. Otherwise it is just natural behavior for a rabbit to dig up your carpet.
- Nipping - Rabbits often nip in order to get attention. In this case, they don't mean to cause you harm, but nips are at the very least annoying.
- Thumping - Rabbits thump their hind legs when they sense danger. It serves as a warning signal for others in the area to watch out or take cover.

## **Spaying or Neutering Your Bunny**

### **Benefits of the Spay/Neuter procedure**

There are so many benefits to fixing your bunny. First and foremost, a fixed rabbit can live a longer, healthier life as the risk of uterine cancer and urinary tract infections are greatly reduced.

Second, a rabbit that is spayed/neutered becomes calmer and easier to manage. Their destructive habits subside a bit, yet they don't lose their charmingly mischievous nature. Altered rabbits are also easier to litter train and have less of an urge to spray.

Spayed and neutered house rabbits are easier to bond because of their calmer demeanor. And of course, an altered couple will not end up with a litter of baby bunnies. While baby bunnies are adorable, it is a lot of time, stress, and care, as well as finding good homes for each one. A rabbit's gestation period is only 28–32 days and can have several litters a year.

## **When Should You Spay or Neuter Your Bunny?**

Male rabbits can be neutered between 3-5 months old. Female rabbits are generally old enough to be spayed between 5-6 months; this is when they reach sexual maturity. When a rabbit reaches middle age (5-6 years) they are considered too old to become altered. Rabbits that are too young or too old have very high risks for complications during surgery.

## **What To Expect From The Surgery**

Spaying is the procedure performed on female rabbits to remove the reproductive organs. The procedure takes place through the abdomen. Blood vessels that lead to the reproductive tract are tied and the reproductive tract is removed. The rabbit then receives several sets of sutures to close her back up.

Neutering is performed on male rabbits to remove the testes. The vet will make an incision in the scrotum and remove the testicles through it. Up to three weeks after surgery, a male rabbit can still have semen stored in his body. For this reason, a recently altered male should be kept away from an unaltered female during this time period.

In order to provide a safe spay/neuter experience for your rabbit, you need to find an experienced vet. When looking for a vet, be sure to ask if he/she has had experience working with rabbits. If there is a local rabbit shelter in your area, they may be able to recommend a vet to you.

Talk to a qualified vet about what to do to prepare your rabbit for surgery and how to provide a care post surgery. Also ask your vet to explain the procedure thoroughly as it may ease your own anxieties to know what will happen.

Be sure to monitor your bunny after the procedure for changes in behavior, failure to eat, pulling at stitches, or signs of infection. Be sure to give pain medications and antibiotics as prescribed by a vet.