

European Rabbit

(*Oryctolagus cuniculus*)



Natural history

Originally from the Iberian peninsula, the rabbit was introduced to the Romans over 2000 years ago.

Rabbits were fully domesticated by the 17th century, and they became

Popular as children's pets during the Victorian era.

Taxonomy

Class Mammalia

Order Lagomorpha

Family Leporidae

European rabbits belong to the same family as hares and cottontail rabbits.

Breeds

There are at least 42 pet rabbit breeds. Popular breeds include the Dutch, Netherland Dwarf (adults weigh 1 kg or less), and Rex rabbits.

Diet

Hay is essential to a rabbit's health. Rabbits should also be fed a small amount of high fiber pellets (minimum 18% fiber), and a variety of **vegetables** including leafy green like cilantro and parsley as well as root vegetables.

	7 wks to 7 mos	7 mos to 1 year	1 to 5 years	> 6 years
Pellets	Unlimited	Reduce to 1/2 cup per 6 lbs	1/4-1/2 cup per 6 lbs	Frail, older rabbits may need unrestricted pellets
Hay	Unlimited	Reduce alfalfa	Unlimited grass hay, oat hay, straw	Alfalfa may be offered to thin rabbits if calcium levels are normal
Vegetables	Introduce one at a time at 12 weeks, < 1/2 oz.	Increase daily ration gradually	1-2 cups per 6 lbs BW	
Fruit		No more	No more	



than
 1-2 oz/6 lb 2 tbs per
 6 lbs

Rabbit Husbandry

Rabbits are crepuscular, but they can adjust their schedule somewhat to that of their human family's schedule. Rabbits are also very social and territorial animals.

House rabbits on solid flooring with recycled paper product or aspen shavings. If wire flooring must be used, cover at least a portion with carpet remnants, grass mats, synthetic sheepskin, or towels (monitor for chewing).

Rabbits may be litter pan trained.

Bunny-proof the home (or a room) by preventing access to electrical cords and other dangerous items while providing safe, chewable items and toys. Rabbits should also be provided with visual security such as a hide box.

Normal physiologic values

Temperature	38.0-39.6°C	101.3-103°F
Pulse	180-325 bpm	
Respiration	30-60 bpm	
Mean life span	6-7 years	
Sexual maturity	4-6 months	smaller breeds 4-4.5 months larger breeds 4.5-5 months
Gestation	30-33 days	
Birth weight	40-50 g	
Target environmental temperature:	60-70°F	15.6-21.0°C
Daily h20 intake	120 ml/kg/day	

Anatomy/ physiology

- Calcium metabolism is unique in rabbits. All ingested calcium is excreted by the kidneys. Therefore urine varies with diet, and may appear thick and creamy white in rabbits on a high-calcium diet.
- Rabbit neutrophils are called heterophils.
- The thymus lies ventral to the heart, and extends up into the thoracic inlet. The large thymus persists, even into adulthood.
- Rabbits are obligate nasal breathers.
- Dental formula: Incisors 2/1 Canines 0/0 Premolars 3/2 Molars 3/3
The peg teeth are the second pair of maxillary incisors positioned behind the first pair. All teeth continuously erupt from the open root.
- Rabbits produce cecotropes ("night feces"), which are regularly ingested.
Cecotrophy provides vitamins B and K, amino acids, and fiber.
- Indigestible fiber (cellulose, lignin) drives gastrointestinal motility.
- Female rabbits are induced ovulators. The uterus consists of two

Rabbit	uterine horns with no uterine body that communicates with two cervixes. The oviducts are very long and coiled.
Anatomy/ physiology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does nurse their young once or twice daily for 3-5 minutes at a time (the milk is extremely rich). • The rabbit skeleton is relatively thin and lightweight, making up 6-8% of body weight.
Preventive medicine	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Castration is recommended to reduce the risk of urine spraying and improve pet quality. 2. Ovariohysterectomy is recommended to prevent uterine adenocarcinoma and improve pet quality. Spaying before 6 months of age is recommended to avoid excess fat.
Important medical conditions	<p>Crystalluria, urolithiasis Encephalitozoonosis Gastrointestinal stasis Lumbosacral fracture, luxation Pasteurellosis Uterine adenocarcinoma</p>
Venipuncture	<p>Collect larger volumes from the jugular vein or lateral saphenous vein. Smaller samples may be taken from the cephalic vein.</p>
Restraint	<p>Rabbits possess a relatively lightweight, delicate skeleton paired with extremely strong, well-developed back and leg muscles. With improper restraint, rabbits that struggle or kick run the risk of a broken back or leg. Always restrain rabbits on a non-slip surface such as a large, heavy towel or pad.</p>
Antibiotics to Avoid	<p>Avoid antimicrobials that attack only gram-positive bacteria such as beta-lactams. P.L.A.C.E.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penicillin • Lincosamide, lincomycin • Amoxicillin, ampicillin • Cephalosporins, clindamycin • Erythromycin

Rabbit

References and further reading

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