

Care of Rabbits: Recommended Diet

BASIC DIET

Rabbit Pellets- A good quality rabbit pellet should be offered daily but in limited quantities. The UNCONTROLLED feeding of a pellet diet can lead to obesity with concurrent heart and liver disease, chronic diarrhea, and kidney disease from the high calcium levels in some pellets. Make sure that you buy pellets high in fiber (18% or more), and that you buy small quantities and keep it refrigerated or cool and dry to prevent spoilage. Old, rancid pellets can contribute to a rabbit who stops eating. The following chart shows DAILY AMOUNTS to be fed to your bunny. DO NOT REFILL THE BOWL even if the pellets are all eaten before the next day.

2-4 lbs. of body weight = ¼ cup daily	8-10 lbs. of body weight = ¾ cup daily
5-7 lbs. of body weight = ½ cup daily	11-15 lbs. of body weight = 1 cup daily

The recommended amount of pellets above refers to adult rabbits only. Young rabbits can eat as much as they want up to about six months of age, then the amount of pellets should be gradually reduced to the suggested amount. (HRS bunnies are fed half the amount in the morning, half in the evening.)

Loose Timothy Hay- TIMOTHY HAY, OR GRASS HAY, OR OAT HAY SHOULD BE OFFERED DAILY. We prefer the loose, long strands of hay, as opposed to the pressed cubes. The fiber in the hay is extremely important in promoting normal digestion and preventing hairballs. These products also contain proteins and other nutrients essential to the good health of your pet. We no longer recommend the use of alfalfa or clover hay, as it has been shown to be too high in calcium and carbohydrates, which may lead to serious health problems and digestive upsets. (HRS bunnies are given a large handful of hay at bedtime).

Fresh and "Treat" Foods- These foods should be given in limited quantities (no more than two or three times per week). Excessive amounts may lead to digestive upsets and loose stools. Give more than one treat food to get the pet used to variety, so that if changes have to be made, they are tolerated more easily. ANY MAJOR CHANGE IN THE TYPES OF FOOD FED TO YOUR PET CAN LEAD

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TO SERIOUS DIGESTIVE UPSETS. Once you establish your pet's routine, please be consistent. The following is the maximum fresh food to be given:

Carrots, carrot tops, beet tops, collard greens, dandelion greens (make sure they are pesticide free), dark leaf lettuce (not iceberg), carrot, alfalfa sprouts, clover sprouts, clover, parsley (plain, not fancy or curly leaf types), and broccoli. Avoid cabbage or kale.

A 2-4 lb. rabbit may have a TOTAL of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of any of the above foods; a 5-7 lb. rabbit may have $\frac{1}{2}$ cup; an 8-10 lb. rabbit may have $\frac{3}{4}$ cup.

Rarely give banana (fattening), dried fruit, crackers, nuts (fattening), and non-sugary breakfast cereals. We really don't recommend starting these treats; this is primarily for a pet that is "hooked" on such food items.

NEVER give salty or sugary snacks or chocolate. These items can lead to a variety of disease problems.

NEVER give a baby bunny fresh greens.

After 3 months, start bunnies very slowly on any fresh food. Give very small amounts a couple of times per week. (HRS rabbits receive fresh treats twice a week, on the days they do not get laxative or acidophilus).

Water- This should always be available, and should be changed daily. A dirty water container can breed bacteria that may cause disease. The container should be either a water bottle or a heavy bowl that is weighted or secured to the side of the cage so that it does not tip over. Do not use medications or vitamins in the water, as your pet may not drink if the taste or color is altered.

Chewing Wood- Chewable toys should always be available: these may include untreated pine or other scrap wood (but not redwood), untreated willow baskets and fruit branches, especially apple and pear (but not apricot, plum or cherry).

Night Feces- It may seem strange to list this as a part of the diet, but these "special droppings" are an essential part of your pet's nutrition. During certain times of the day, usually in the evening, you may observe your pet licking the anal area and actually eating some of the droppings in the process. These cecal pellets, as they are called, are softer and greener than the normal hard, round waste droppings. Your pet knows when these droppings are being produced and will take care of eating them himself. These cecal pellets come from the cecum, which is the part of the digestive system where fermentation of food takes place. The pellets are rich in vitamins and nutrients, which are needed by your pet to maintain good health. After eating these "vitamin pellets," he will re-digest the material and extract all the necessary elements. This habit may appear distasteful to us, but it is normal and important for your pet.

Occasionally a rabbit will drop these cecal pellets along with the waste pellets, instead of eating them. They will be soft, but formed, and they will have an odor. This is not considered diarrhea; if it only occurs occasionally, it is not considered a disease problem.

SUPPLEMENTS

Vitamins- These are not felt to be necessary if the rabbit is getting pellets in the diet. In fact, indiscriminate use of vitamins may lead to over-dosage and serious disease.

Acidophilus- HRS recommends about 1/8 teaspoon once a week; however, amounts need not be exact. The acidophilus may be administered through a variety of methods. Lightly mist two tablespoons of rolled oats (not instant) and sprinkle them with acidophilus; mist small shredded wheat squares and press the acidophilus into them with the back of a spoon; mix with a piece of mashed banana; mix with carrot or applesauce baby food; or mix with nutrical. Acidophilus is available in powdered form at many health food stores. Bunnies on antibiotics must be given acidophilus or yogurt daily.

Salt or Mineral Block- This is unnecessary for a house pet on the described diet.

Prozyme- This is a multiple enzyme product that is very effective in preventing hairballs and enteritis. (HRS bunnies over the age of one year are given 1/4 teaspoon two times per week.) To administer Prozyme, mist pellets with water and dust the product onto them. Rabbits should be given 1/8 teaspoon in the morning and 1/8 teaspoon in the evening.

Laxative- We recommend giving five inches of laxative twice per week as a preventative against hairballs. (HRS bunnies will take laxative directly from the container and consider it a treat; however, most rabbits initially resist eating the laxative). To get your bunny accustomed to it, leave about five inches of the product on top of an overturned heavy dish in his cage before you go to bed. Rabbits are alert at night, and in their boredom will experiment with this new substance. Once they are eating it at night, try offering it straight from the container.