PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

Common health problems in rabbits include:

- **Hairballs.** Prevent these with regular brushing and a high-fiber diet with unlimited timothy hay. Surgery may be necessary if they cause gut blockage.

- **Overgrown teeth.** Feeding rabbits a high-fiber diet allows them to grind down their teeth to a usable length. If the teeth grow too long, they cause pain and prevent rabbits from eating. See a vet immediately if this is the case.

- **Overgrown nails.** Nails should be trimmed every 3–4 weeks.

- **“Snuffles.”** This is a bacterial infection most often affecting the eyes (discharge, redness) or nose (discharge, sneezing). Treatment requires antibiotics. See a vet immediately.

Vet visits every 6–12 months are recommended, as well as a routine checkup after adopting your rabbit. **Spaying** female rabbits at 4–6 months of age is recommended, and **neutering** male rabbits decreases aggressive behavior.

Visit a vet immediately if your rabbit has reduced appetite, diarrhea, no feces, drooling, bloating, lethargy or difficulty urinating.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more comprehensive information on rabbit care, visit:

- rabbit.org
- myhouserabbit.com
- rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rabbits
- seavs.com

Area Vets

**Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services**
4015 Rust Rd.
Fairfax, VA 22030
(703) 491-1111

**Pender Veterinary Clinic**
4001 Legato Rd.
Fairfax, VA 22033
(703) 654-3100

**Paws, Purrs & Exotics**
5838-A North Kings Highway
Alexandria, VA 22303
(703) 549-7297

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Animal Welfare League of Arlington

2650 Arlington Mill Dr.
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: 703-931-9241
www.awla.org
mail@awla.org

CARING FOR RABBITS

A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE
Diet

Food
- Timothy hay should be available in your rabbit’s cage at all times and comprise 75–80% of its diet. Orchard grass, oat hay and meadow grass are acceptable alternatives.
- Timothy hay-based pellets are an optional supplement to hay. Recommended daily amount varies depending on your rabbit’s weight.
- Rabbits should be fed about one cup of leafy green vegetables per 2 pounds of body weight each day. Suitable greens include romaine lettuce, red or green lettuce, carrot tops, kale, bok choy, endive and turnip greens.
- Do not feed rabbits yogurt drops, nuts, seeds, or vegetables high in calcium. Alfalfa hay should not be fed to rabbits over 6 months old.

Water
- Provide in a bottle or spill-proof water bowl. Change water daily.

Housing

Caging
- Cages should be a minimum of 12 square feet, depending on your rabbit’s size. An additional exercise space should be provided. Rabbits should spend at least 5 hours of their day in this exercise space or a comparable safe, enclosed exercise area.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.
- Be sure to “bunny proof” your house before letting a rabbit explore. Keep harmful products out of reach and prevent rabbits from chewing on objects such as power cords.
- In this climate, rabbits should be kept indoors. They are susceptible to overheating at temperatures above 85°F.

Environment
- Rabbit cages should contain:
  - A litter box containing a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh. Encourage your rabbit to use it by placing it where they most often eliminate. Remove waste daily.
  - Safe materials, such as non-toxic cardboard, untreated wood or commercially available chew toys, to encourage natural chewing behavior and prevent dental disease.
  - Other commercially available toys or food-stuffed objects. Toys should be regularly rearranged throughout the cage to promote mental stimulation.
  - Unlimited access to water and hay.

Bedding
- Cages should be lined with a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh or Yesterday’s News. Do not use wood shavings or cat litter.
- Bedding should be spot cleaned daily and changed weekly.

General Care

- Rabbits should be either housed separately or paired with a bonded mate.
- Rabbits should generally be left in an enclosure when unsupervised.
- Rabbits spending time outdoors should do so in a safe enclosure and be under constant supervision. Keep them away from grass that has been treated with pesticides or chemicals.
- Rabbits shed heavily about every three months. They should be brushed at least weekly to prevent hairballs.

Behavior
- Rabbits are crepuscular; they sleep during the day and night, and are most active at dawn and twilight.
- Rabbits sometimes communicate through vocalizations. Grunting/growling indicates anger, squealing indicates pain or distress and clicking or “buzzing” of the teeth indicates happiness and contentment.