

## Common Illnesses

**Dental Problems** – rabbit's teeth continue to grow throughout their life, at a rate of 2-3mm per week. Rabbits require a high fibre diet to ensure the teeth are evenly worn and to prevent overgrowth. If the teeth are not worn down, they grow incorrectly leading to discomfort, abscesses, anorexia, etc. Indication of dental problems may be saliva around the mouth, on the chest or front paws, an inability to eat or teeth grinding.

**Flystrike** – flies are attracted to rabbit droppings, either in the hutch or around the rear end of the rabbit. Fly eggs will hatch into maggots and will initially feed on the droppings and will then burrow into the rabbit and eat its flesh. This results in discomfort, pain and, often, death. Avoid flystrike by removing droppings regularly from the hutch, grooming your rabbit daily and ensuring good ventilation to the hutch, as this will prevent flies becoming attracted to, and then trapped in the hutch. Spray **Keep It Clean** in the hutch, on bedding and on your rabbits coat to deter flies and eliminate bacteria.

**Snuffles/Pasturella** – this is a condition caused by bacteria and can be related to stress (such as high temperature, draughts, weaning etc.). The animal will develop cold-like symptoms, with a runny nose, breathing difficulties and discharge from the eyes. Snuffles can lead to more serious problems, such as pneumonia, head tilt and tooth root abscesses. Keep your hutch well ventilated and at a fairly constant temperature (around 16°C). Avoid leaving damp bedding in the hutch, and keep stress to a minimum.

**Gastro-intestinal Disorders** – may be caused by such things as inappropriate diet, stress, the presence of parasites, etc. Your rabbit will have a digestive upset and exhibit symptoms such as bloat, constipation or diarrhoea, or a combination of these. It is extremely important that rabbits are treated quickly during this period to prevent dehydration or the condition worsening, as rabbits health can deteriorate very quickly. Contact your vet for advice on treatment.

**Myxomatosis** – this is a disease transmitted by fleas, or from contact with other infected rabbits or objects. Symptoms are usually swollen eyelids and thick discharge from the eyes and nose. The rabbit will become very subdued and stop eating. This condition is usually fatal. Take your rabbit to the vet immediately if he shows any of these symptoms, and isolate him from any other rabbits. Remember vaccination of your rabbit can control strains of this disease

Always consult a vet if you have ANY reason for concern.

## Rabbit Profile

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| Latin name:       | <i>Oryctolagus cuniculus</i>  |
| Female:           | Doe   |
| Male:             | Buck  |
| Young:            | Kittens   |
| Life span:        | 5 – 8 years (domesticated)  |
| Litter size:      | 4 – 12 kittens  |
| Birth weight:     | 30 – 80g  |
| Eyes open:        | 10 days   |
| Gestation period: | 30-33 days  |
| Average weight:   | Male 1 – 5 kg Female 1 – 8 kg   |
| Sexual maturity:  | 16 – 24 weeks   |
| Weaning age:      | 4 – 7 weeks   |
| Diet:             | Herbivorous   |
| Vaccinations:     | Myxomatosis, (every 6 – 12 months depending on risk in your area), VHD (annually) |

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# Russel's Guide to Rabbits



  
**Supreme**

## Introduction

This leaflet includes information on how to care for your rabbit including feeding, housing and common illnesses.

Rabbits are very playful and loving animals and deserve consideration and commitment when being looked after as a pet.

## History of Rabbits

Originally the European rabbit was found in the wild, in regions of Spain, Portugal and North West Africa. Rabbits were introduced to England in the 11th Century and used for sport, meat and, in some cases, fur (such as the Angora rabbits whose fur was spun for wool). Along the way, the process of domestication began by keeping rabbits in hutches for breeding and meat production.

Gradually rabbits were bred for colour and also to enter into friendly competitions. The 19th Century saw rabbits become household pets.

The Latin name for rabbits is "*Oryctolagus cuniculus*". Oryct is Greek for digger, lag is Greek for hare and cuniculus is Latin for burrowing.



## Colours/Patterns/Markings

There are a wide variety of sizes, shapes, colours and coats (over 100 different breeds altogether). Some rabbits have been bred for particular characteristics such as long ears (lops), long coats (Angoras) and there are dwarf breeds who have shortened noses and faces.



The most common breeds kept as pets are the Dutch, Dwarf Lop and the Netherland Dwarf.

## Nutritional Requirements

In their natural habitat rabbits eat a range of grasses, weeds, leaves, shoots and twigs as well as the bark of shrubs, bushes and trees. Rabbits are herbivores and their digestive system has evolved to be extremely efficient, with the ability to eliminate indigestible fibre rapidly and ferment those fibres that are digestible.

Due to their special digestive system, rabbits need a balanced diet with high levels of fibre to keep their gut healthy and encourage teeth grinding to keep their continually growing teeth in trim and to ensure that they stay healthy.

Rabbits must be fed twice a day, every day (in the morning and in the evening). A good quality, heavy, earthenware food bowl is essential to keep the food dry and clean, and prevent the rabbit from tipping food on to the floor of the hutch.

## Feeding Your Rabbit

### Russel Rabbit Original

**Russel Rabbit Original** is a complete diet for adult rabbits. It contains alfalfa, that is naturally rich in calcium, protein and fibre and lots of other ingredients including maize, oats, and peas. This variety of ingredients encourages rabbit's natural foraging behaviour, whilst the different textures help to keep its continually growing teeth in trim. **Russel Rabbit Original** contains all the essential vitamins and minerals required to keep a rabbit fit and healthy.



### Russel Rabbit Carrot & Leek Gourmet

**Russel Rabbit Carrot and Leek Gourmet** is a tasty alternative to Russel Rabbit Original. Like Russel Rabbit Original it is also a complete food and contains high levels of fibre and all the vitamins and minerals needed to keep rabbits fit and healthy. **Russel Rabbit Carrot and Leek Gourmet** contains lots of tasty leek and carrot that rabbits love and is free from colourants.

### Russel Junior

**Russel Junior** is a complete food, specially formulated for the needs of young rabbits (4-20 weeks). It is also suitable for dwarf rabbits and pregnant or lactating does, that benefit from enhanced protein and fibre levels. **Russel Junior** is free from colourants.



### Supreme Science – Selective

**Supreme Science – Selective** is made especially for rabbits who are picky eaters. In every mouthful there is the correct nutrition to meet rabbit's nutritional needs. The food contains lots of fibre (19%) that helps to keep your rabbit's teeth in trim and maintain healthy digestion. There is also a "prebiotic" that expels harmful bacteria and maintains healthy gut flora.

Ensure there is fresh drinking water available at all times.

## Looking After Your Rabbit

### Housing

A good hutch will have two compartments – one for the day and one to nest and hide in at night.

The minimum size for a good hutch is 4ft x 2ft x 2ft high (120cm x 60cm x 60cm) for a single, medium size breed. It should be around 4-5 times the length of the rabbit when the rabbit is stretched out. The hutch will need to be much larger if you are keeping more than one rabbit. It should always be high enough to enable the rabbit to sit upright, with its ears pricked up, without touching the top of the hutch.

The hutch should be placed in a position that is sheltered, out of direct sunlight. Extremes of temperature can cause stress, that may result in discomfort or illness.

In cold weather there must be adequate protection from draughts, wind and rain. Plastic sheets over the front of the cage can prevent rain from driving into the cage, but should allow for ventilation.

Place the hutch on bricks or legs to avoid becoming damp during wet weather. Ensure the roof is sloping, waterproofed and overhangs slightly to avoid poor drainage on the top surface. Always ensure hutch doors are locked to avoid accidental escape or access by predators, such as foxes.

## Hutch Hygiene

You will need to provide a fresh safe bedding that is highly absorbent, to keep your rabbit safe and warm. Hutches should be cleaned out on a regular basis. This is especially important in warmer weather in order to prevent flies being attracted to the hutch, as this may result in an infestation of maggots. In the winter months, bedding can become damp and mouldy from extreme weather.

### Cleaning Spray

**Keep It Clean** is a cage and hutch cleaner that eliminates pet odours, germs and bacteria (which can harm your pet). **Keep It Clean** can be sprayed on the bedding as well as inside the cage or hutch ensuring that your pet's home is truly clean at all times.

### Russel Bedding

**Russel Bedding** is made from the highest quality barley straw, chopped for extra comfort and dust extracted. It fluffs up to provide a natural, warm bedding that is ideal for your rabbit. Because it is completely natural, **Russel Bedding** is safer than some other types of bedding. It is also treated with a non-toxic cleaning agent to eliminate pet odours, germs and bacteria.

### Supreme Science – Carefresh

Alternatively there is **Supreme Science – Carefresh**, which is even more absorbent than traditional bedding and eliminates pet odours. It is dust free and hypo-allergenic and is, therefore, particularly suitable if your rabbit has any sort of allergy or respiratory illness. It is safe and hygienic and has been heat treated to inhibit bacteria and fungi growth. **Supreme Science – Carefresh**, is especially suitable for rabbits kept indoors.

## Exercise

It is important to provide a run for your rabbit that allows plenty of room to exercise. Rabbits are naturally frightened of large, open spaces and love playing in a run that contains playthings, such as boxes, flowerpots, drainpipes and logs. Security and position are extremely important to avoid any harm or stress to your rabbit during his playtime.



Russel & Frankie's Feeding Ball

Rabbits are naturally very active and inquisitive animals. They like to keep themselves busy and, when allowed, spend the majority of their time running around and investigating their surroundings, so accessories can provide hours of enjoyment for your pet. Check out the 'Furry Fun' accessories range from Supreme Petfoods.

### Russel & Frankie's Feeding Ball

**Russel & Frankie's Feeding Ball** is designed to make feeding time fun. Place some food in the ball and as your rabbit plays, the ball dispenses food, encouraging activity and keeping your pet amused and happy. It increases the eating period, thereby preventing boredom and keeping him fit at the same time.

## Handling Your Rabbit

The best way to pick up your rabbit is to talk to him as you approach - on the same level. Crouch in front of him and let him come to you, presenting the back of your hand for him to sniff.

Gently take hold of the scruff with one hand, and support the weight of the rabbit by scooping the rump with the other hand.

Place him on your lap or hold him to your chest and very slowly stand up.



## Companionship

Your rabbit will enjoy having a companion, but you must have a hutch which is large enough to accommodate more than one rabbit. It is best to acquire littermates in order to avoid fighting. Single sex groups will normally be fine. However, females can be more temperamental during the breeding season. Males will live happily together but may become agitated and fight if in the proximity of a female. One female and one male will be happy together but will result in litters unless one of the pair is neutered.

Rabbits should never be paired with guinea pigs, as rabbits are naturally dominant and may try to bully the guinea pigs or, even worse, attack them.