

## Possible Signs of Illness, Neglect or Intentional Cruelty

### Appearance of Animal

Thin; fur in poor condition; sores from scratching; portions of ears missing because of frostbite or because they were bitten off from overcrowding.

### Housing Conditions

Overcrowded conditions; must be sufficient space to permit all rabbits (including smaller ones) access to food and water.

### Behavior

Dull, minimally responsive, not interested in surroundings, no appetite.



## Reporting Cruelty

Animal cruelty should be reported to the police department of the town in which the animal lives. Please leave your name and contact information so that a follow-up response may be made.

## Additional Resources

House Rabbit Society  
[www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org)

Humane Society  
of the United States  
[www.humanesociety.org/animals/rabbits](http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/rabbits)

ASPCA  
[www.aspca.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/general-rabbit-care](http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/general-rabbit-care)



For more information about animal cruelty, visit  
[www.humane.nh.gov](http://www.humane.nh.gov)  
Be sure to view the **Interactive Presentation** on the **Welcome Page**.

# CARING FOR RABBITS



## Recommendations

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The Governor's  
Commission  
on the  
Humane  
Treatment  
of  
Animals



*Template Courtesy of Vermont Humane Federation*

# RABBITS—The Basics

## Terminology

**Female**-Doe

**Male**-Buck

**Kit**-Baby rabbit

## Care Recommendations

Rabbits should not be considered a low maintenance starter pet for children. Although they are very curious and cute:

- They are somewhat boring for the uninitiated.
- They don't come when called.
- They don't play fetch.
- Many people have allergies to them.
- They require daily care.
- They require grooming—brushing, ear cleaning and nail trimming.

## Housing

Although rabbits can live outdoors with proper housing, it is recommended that pet rabbits live indoors. They are not designed to live on wire floors, endure extreme temperatures, be available to predators, or live in isolation.

Cages should be 4 times the size of rabbit. Pet store cages are usually not big enough. More space is best!

Use of one or two rooms for daily supervised roaming is desirable, but they must be "bunny proofed" first.

Rabbits can be destructive: Digging and chewing are natural behaviors.

Rabbits can be litter box trained. Dusty or clumping litter, or wood shavings should be avoided.

Rabbits spend a lot of time in their box resting. The ideal bedding would be grass hay.

## Diet

- Water should be available at all times.
- Good quality pellets.
- Fresh hay (alfalfa, timothy or oat).
- Fresh vegetables.
- Fruit may be given as a daily snack, not as primary food.
- A salt lick should be available.

A veterinarian or the recommended web resources can suggest specific fruits or vegetables to offer.

## Behavior

- Rabbits should not be disciplined or punished. This only creates fear and defensive biting and scratching.
- They are naturally fearful of being picked-up, and/or held so must be acclimated to this. A scared rabbit may squeal or growl.
- Most rabbits are naturally shy of strangers.
- Rabbits are coprophagic—they eat special moist pellets (cecotrophs) directly from their anus for the nutrients and intestinal bacteria. This is quick and normal and often goes unnoticed.

## Veterinary Care

Rabbits should be spayed or neutered by a veterinarian experienced with rabbit surgeries. Spaying or neutering prevents unwanted litters, spraying in males and uterine cancer in females. Rabbits should have annual check-ups.

If the rabbit stops eating or moving his bowels for 12 hours or longer or has watery diarrhea, the rabbit should be brought to a veterinarian. Other signs of illness include runny nose and eyes, dark red urine, lethargy, fur loss and red, swollen skin.

