

# A Quick Guide to Rabbit Care...

...because bunnies need more than carrots and a cage.

Rabbits are intelligent, social—and cute!—animals who make wonderful companions. The problem is, too many people think of them as “low-maintenance” pets, when in reality they require lots of care and attention. Whether you’ve had a pet bunny for years or are about to bring one home for the first time, follow these simple guidelines to keep your rabbit happy and healthy.



**Caging.** Like all companion animals, rabbits should be kept inside with the family. Although rabbits should be given supervised run of the house, they need a place of their own for security and quiet time. Rabbits’ cages should be spacious to give them room to exercise and stretch out. For a 6-pound rabbit, the cage should be at least 24 inches wide by 18 inches high by 24 inches deep. A large cage, however, is no substitute for socialization and running time around the house.

**Housetraining and Bunny-proofing.** You can help make housetraining easier for your rabbit by placing a litter box inside the cage and at least one outside the cage, too. Before you let your bunny run around the house, make sure all electrical cords are concealed. Rabbits are natural chewers, so give them chewing material to deter them from chewing furnishings.



**Handling.** If you have children, supervise them with the rabbit and make sure they never pick the rabbit up by the ears or let the body hang (a rabbit’s weight must always be supported with another hand). A rabbit’s natural instinct is to be close to the ground, so try sitting on the floor until your rabbit becomes more comfortable being handled.

**Feeding.** Provide your rabbit with fresh water daily, and clean the water bottle frequently. When feeding your rabbit, remember that moderation is the key. A rabbit’s diet should consist of a reputable brand of pellets; greens such as parsley, dandelion greens, and carrot tops; and small quantities of snacks such as golden raisins, shredded wheat, and dried bread. Never feed your rabbit lettuce, tomatoes, cabbage, or table scraps; these foods can cause bloat and diarrhea. Make sure your bunny has fresh hay available at all times for chewing and roughage.



**Health Concerns.** Bunnies have sensitive respiratory and digestive systems. Because rabbits cannot vomit and are susceptible to fatal blockage, it is essential they be fed a proper diet and be groomed regularly to prevent hair balls (use special grooming tools, never scissors). Because your rabbit’s teeth grow continuously and are susceptible to a condition called malocclusion (improper bite), you must check the teeth regularly. To learn more about rabbit health concerns, consult your veterinarian.

**Spaying and Neutering.** Spaying or neutering your rabbit not only helps fight rabbit overpopulation, but also improves litter box habits, corrects chewing behavior, and decreases territorial aggression. Have your rabbit sterilized between 3 1/2 and 6 months of age by a veterinarian experienced in rabbit care and surgery.



**Supplies.** *Housing:* roomy cage, resting board, litter box, pellet bowl or feeder, water bottle, chewing material (such as untreated wood approved for rabbits). *Foods:* fresh pellets, fresh water, limited treats (veggies, fruit, barley, oats, crackers), hay (for chewing and to aid digestion), multiple enzymes (to aid digestion and prevent blockage), and petroleum laxative (for passing hair). *Grooming:* flea comb, brush, and toenail clippers. *Cleaning supplies:* dust-free litter (or paper-product litter), scoop, broom/dustpan, white vinegar (for urine accidents), and chlorine bleach (for disinfecting).

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Provided by The Humane Society of the United States