



## Monticello Animal Hospital

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## RABBITS

### General Information:

Rabbits are much more social than people think. For generations, people have pictured rabbits outside in a backyard hutch, due to their habit of defecating whenever they feel the need. On the contrary, rabbits can be trained to use a litter box, just like a cat. This new revelation has brought the rabbit from being housed outside to being an indoor pet, giving owners more time to spend with their pet. Rabbits who are housed indoors quickly become integrated into the family's daily activities and add their own personalities into the mix.

### Housing:

When keeping a rabbit inside, a cage is still an essential need. Here the rabbit will find a private place to rest and feel secure. You should never leave a rabbit running loose in your house unattended. Because they are diggers and chewers, they can get into all sorts of trouble when unsupervised.

Portable pen-type cages are very popular due to the ease of cleaning and the ability to move them around. The size should be large enough for your pet to move about and play. Whatever the setup you choose, remember that rabbits like to dig and chew, so place the cage in a rabbit-proof area of your home. Buying a large piece of linoleum to use under the cage can eliminate digging behavior and makes for easy cleaning. As long as your bunny has access to his/her litter box, cleaning the cage area should not be a chore. Rabbits also enjoy having a box to sleep and hide in as well as toys to play with. Some rabbits like tossing cardboard rolls, empty soda bottles or cat toys around. Each bunny is different so try different toys.

### Litterbox:

You should change the litter box 3 – 4 times a week, depending on the number of rabbits you keep. A very good litter out on the market is called Carefresh. It is a newspaper based litter and is very soft and absorbent. Carefresh is recommended over using cat litter because cat litter, if ingested, can cause gastrointestinal problems. A clean litterbox is essential and some rabbits have been known to quit using the box if it is not cleaned regularly.



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### Feeding:

There are many false ideas about just what a rabbit should be fed. The diet we recommend at our hospital is an unlimited quantity of fresh grass hay, approximately ½ cup of alfalfa pellets, and a small quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables (usually given daily as treats). The hay is essential because it is high in fiber and keeps the bunny's digestive tract moving. Timothy or brome are both good choices. One important side note to remember: alfalfa is like the 'candy bar' of foods (both pellets and hay). Rabbits will usually eat alfalfa with gusto but too much alfalfa can cause urinary problems and gastrointestinal problems. So don't overdo the alfalfa just because that is what your rabbit likes to eat!

### Diseases:

#### Trichobezars-

This is commonly known as a hairball. Rabbits can develop large trichobezars in their stomachs, which can cause an impaction and stomach cramps. Typical symptoms include lack of appetite, decreased stool production, lethargy and grinding of the teeth. Pineapple juice can be given to help breakdown these hairballs. We recommend approximately 1 – 2 cc of pineapple juice every 2 – 3 weeks to help prevent large hairballs from forming. Since rabbits do not have the ability to vomit, this can potentially be a life threatening problem!

#### External Parasites-

External parasites present themselves on the hair coat or skin of your pet. If you notice your bunny's fur contains dandruff-like flakes, he/she may have fur mites or lice. Your vet will recommend a skin scraping to rule out these parasites. Fleas can also be a problem on rabbits. Always check with your vet as to which flea control product is safe to use.

Examining your pet's ears on a regular basis will help you catch any signs of ear mites. These parasites live down in the ear canal. A dark, crusty discharge in the ear may indicate this parasite. Again, this problem can be treated with medicine from your rabbits vet.

#### Malocclusion-

Malocclusion is misalignment of the jaws so that the teeth do not wear down properly when the rabbit chews. Rabbits have continuously growing teeth and therefore must meet properly to keep the teeth worn down. Lack of appetite should be a red flag to rabbit owners. Rabbits love to eat so any time their eating habits change, pay close attention. Drooling can indicate a tooth problem. If the teeth are not wearing evenly, they can grow points that dig into the rabbit's cheek and tongue, making eating very painful. In some cases, trimming of the molars



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will help the bunny eat again. If your rabbit has malocclusion you will have to have their teeth trimmed on a regular basis by your veterinarian.

### Abcesses-

The most common places they can be found are around the jaw area (usually in association with a tooth problem) and the legs or feet. But they can occur anywhere on the body. Because the pus a rabbit produces is very thick, abcesses can be difficult to cure. Treatment usually involves cleaning the area while under sedation.

Pasturella is a bacterial disease that can cause abcesses. Pasturella also causes respiratory symptoms, which include sneezing and nasal discharge. If you notice your bunny have any nasal discharge, a trip to the vet is a must! Pasturella is not curable, but can be controlled with proper medication.