



## Yarmouth Veterinary Center

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# YVCipedia RABBITS

## Care Sheet

**Date:** Tuesday, July 8, 2025

**Patient:** MAVERICK Smith

## Species Overview

Domestic rabbits are medium-sized herbivorous mammals with continuously growing teeth and a sensitive digestive system. They are intelligent, social, and often live 8–12 years with proper care. Many develop strong bonds with their human families and display playful behaviors like “binkies” (joyful jumps and twists). Despite their quiet demeanor, they are curious, expressive, and thrive in enriched environments.

## Housing & Environment

Rabbits should be housed indoors for their safety and wellbeing. Their enclosure must allow them to stretch out, stand on their hind legs, and hop several steps in all directions. Wire-bottom cages should be avoided to prevent foot injuries. In addition to their primary space, rabbits need daily time outside of their enclosure for exercise and interaction.

- **Minimum enclosure size:** 2×4 ft for a single rabbit
- **Daily exercise:** 1–4 hours in a rabbit-proofed area
- **Flooring:** Solid, with fleece or soft mats; avoid wire
- **Temperature:** Ideal range 60–70°F; provide cooling in warmer conditions
- **Enrichment:** Hide boxes, cardboard tunnels, chew toys, hay-filled litter boxes

## Diet & Nutrition

The cornerstone of rabbit health is a high-fiber diet. Unlimited access to fresh grass hay supports digestion and prevents dental disease. Pellets and leafy greens provide additional nutrients, while fruits and root vegetables should be limited due to high sugar content. Clean, fresh water must be available at all times.

- **Hay:** Unlimited grass hay (timothy, orchard, meadow)
- **Pellets:** High-fiber, plain pellets (~¼ cup per 5 lb adult rabbit) - we recommend Oxbow
- **Leafy greens:** 1 cup per 2 lb body weight daily (e.g., romaine, cilantro, kale)
- **Treats:** Limited fruits/veggies like apple slices, carrots
- **Water:** Offered in bowl or bottle and refreshed daily - we recommend both a bowl and bottle ideally

## Healthcare

Rabbits benefit greatly from annual wellness exams with a veterinarian experienced in exotic pets. These checkups allow for monitoring of dental health, weight, and signs of internal illness. Spaying and neutering can prevent reproductive cancers and behavior issues but there is an increased risk of complications with rabbits, anesthesia, and the procedures - at YVC we recommend consulting with your veterinarian to discuss whether spaying or neutering your rabbit is an appropriate approach. Rabbits are prone to several health problems that often require early intervention.

- **Annual vet exams:** Include weight, dental check, and GI health
- **Vaccines:** Discuss based on risk - YVC currently has a special exemption to acquire the RHDV vaccine
- **Spay/neuter:** Typically performed at 3–6 months of age

- **Common conditions:** GI stasis, dental overgrowth, urinary issues, ear infections, mites, respiratory disease

## Behavior & Handling

As prey animals, rabbits are naturally cautious and prefer interactions on their terms. With patience and positive reinforcement, most rabbits enjoy gentle handling. Always support both the chest and hindquarters when lifting to prevent spinal injuries. Bonded rabbits may form lifelong social attachments, and solo rabbits often seek interaction with their humans.

- **Social needs:** Benefit from companionship (rabbit or human)
- **Handling:** Support the entire body; never lift by ears or scruff
- **Signs of stress or illness:** Hiding, decreased appetite, teeth grinding, lethargy, smaller feces

## Grooming & Enrichment

Regular grooming is essential, especially during seasonal shedding. Brushing helps prevent hair ingestion and gastrointestinal blockages. Nails should be trimmed every few weeks, and bedding kept clean to avoid flystrike or skin issues. Enrichment through toys, foraging opportunities, and interaction helps reduce boredom and destructive behavior.

- **Brushing:** Weekly; daily when shedding
- **Nail trimming:** As needed - we offer this service at YVC for those unable or uncomfortable with trimming their own rabbit's nails
- **Bathing:** We do not recommend that you bathe a rabbit; spot-clean with a damp cloth
- **Toys:** Chew toys, cardboard boxes, tunnels, foraging puzzles - never too many things for your rabbit to chew on!

## Fun Facts & FAQs

- **Binkies** are exuberant hops and twists that rabbits do when they're happy.
- Rabbits can be **litter-trained** by placing hay in large boxes with paper-based litter.
- **Head tilt** may indicate inner ear infections or parasitic infection (e.g., *E. cuniculi*)—seek veterinary care.
- Rabbits have **28 teeth**, all of which grow continuously and require natural wear through chewing.
- Many rabbits enjoy music, nose rubs, and routines—some can even learn basic tricks!

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## Supplies Checklist

- Indoor enclosure or pen with solid flooring
- Litter boxes and paper-based litter
- Unlimited grass hay
- Pellets (plain, grass-based)
- Daily leafy greens
- Water bowl and bottle
- Nail trimmers, soft brush
- Safe chew toys and tunnels
- Secure, well ventilated carrier for vet visits