

RABBIT DIET

Rabbit digestive systems are very different to ours as they have to break down grass and other strong vegetable matter. To get the nutrients out of the grass, etc, they ferment it like cows and horses. This process occurs in the caecum, a large blind ended sac coming off the intestines. This is a very complicated digestive system and requires the rabbit to eat the faecal pellets it passes during the night and then the nutrients are extracted from this as it passes through the gut the second time around. (Yuk I know but it is really important that you do not clean out your rabbits cage in the evening!)

Hay should make up the bulk of your rabbits diet. They should always have fresh, clean hay available for munching. Overall it should make up 80-90% of your rabbits diet. Make sure that it is hay of the best quality (smells fresh, no prickles or excessive dust and no mould). Timothy hay is the best and can be purchased at most pet stores.

The other 10-20% of your rabbits diet should be fresh vegetables, herbs and grasses. These should be provided fresh daily and any that hasn't been eaten that day removed so that it does not spoil. Some vegetables and greenery are toxic to rabbits and should be completely avoided. These included iceberg lettuce, onions, garlic, potatoes, rhubarb, sweet potato, tomato plants, chillies. Human foods can also be dangerous to rabbits so only fresh vegetables.

Rabbits require vegetables with vitamin C as they are unable to make their own (as are humans). Small amounts of parsley is a good source, as are pieces of tomato (fruit) orange or pineapple. Alternatively, some rabbits are given small quantities of pineapple juice in their water (5%) but if you do this you must change the water daily as it can spoil very quickly.

The natural diet of rabbits has a large amount of fibre which wears their teeth down. Because of this, rabbits teeth are continually growing at a rate of 2-3 mm per week. This can cause problems when we are giving them processed foods that aren't causing wear on the teeth. For this reason, your rabbit will require something that it can chew on to wear its teeth down and control their shape.

If you are providing your rabbit with branches or wood to chew, please ensure that it is **NOT** from cedar, plum, redwood, cherry or oleander trees and is not treated with

anything as these are toxic to your rabbit.

There are many pellets and rabbit mixes available at the supermarket and pet stores. These are very high in fat, protein and carbohydrates and can cause significant health problems if they make up the majority of your rabbits diet. The mixes can also be problematic as the rabbits tend to just pick out their favourite bits and leave the other more nutritious parts behind. These mixes and pellets are known to cause problems such as urinary tract diseases, obesity, gastrointestinal upsets and dental overgrowth. One tablespoon of a good quality pellet such as oxbow pellets is enough to supplement a balanced diet for your rabbit.

If you are planning to change your rabbits diet, it must be done gradually to prevent gastrointestinal upsets. This includes new hay or changes in pellets. Mix bales of hay together when changing then increase the proportion of the new hay over 7-10 days. When removing or changing grains or pellets, this should be done gradually over a period of two weeks also.

Fresh, clean, cool water should be available for your rabbit at all times, and thankfully many rabbits learn quickly how to use dripper bottles. On hot days, frozen water bottle can be hidden in the straw of your rabbits bedding for them to lie against, they work out really quickly that it's nice and cool!

This is a guide only and by no means an exclusive diet, there are some other vegetables and grasses that may not be appropriate for your rabbit but we cannot list everything here. If you have any further questions regarding your rabbits dietary requirements please contact the clinic on **53811996**.