

Companion Animal Newsletter - June 2018

RABBIT FRIENDLY STATUS - SILVER AWARD!

This practice has been assessed
by RWAFF and granted

SILVER

rabbit friendly status

Dalehead Vet Group Ltd 22/05/2018



We have a very timely and exciting announcement to make, with Rabbit Awareness Week at the beginning of June: Dalehead Veterinary Group Ltd have been granted SILVER Rabbit Friendly Status by RWAFF (Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund).

To be granted status, the RWAFF carry out rigorous assessment which is then presented to Richard Saunders BSc (Hons) BVSc, MSB, CBiol, DZooMed (Mammalian), MRCVS, who is a leading rabbit clinician in our profession and RWAFF vet specialist advisor. Richard then makes the important decision as to whether the practice meets the criteria to be granted the status.



Spuggles gives
the thumbs up!



We are very lucky to have Rebecca Frost BVSc, MRCVS as part of our veterinary team, who has a particular interest in rabbit medicine. We have received our accreditation in recognition of Beccy's specialism as well as the rabbit friendly culture of the practice as a whole.

PET LOSS AND BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT

Head Nurse Katherine McNamee and RVN Glenys Sedgwick attended a course about Pet Loss and Bereavement Support in Harrogate last month. As veterinary staff we are able to offer support and assistance to pet owners through these difficult times and can reassure and guide you through euthanasia procedures and the choices you have to make for your pet. We understand the grief and love you have for your pet and we are here to help allay any fears or concerns you may have.

Katherine and Glen are now Pet Loss and Bereavement Support Advisors offering face to face or telephone guidance. They are able to offer support before, during and after you and your pets final moments together. If you need help deciding how to come to the decision and any support throughout -please contact them at the Settle surgery.

FEEDING YOUR RABBIT



Feeding your rabbit a suitable diet is the best thing you can do to keep it healthy. It can help prevent some diet associated illnesses e.g. obesity, gut motility issues, dental disease.

If you remember just one thing from reading this, then it's that rabbits eat grass and hay. Just remember that and you'll be helping your rabbit as best as you can. They are strict herbivores so need to live off plants. Plants contain fibre which is very important for wearing rabbit teeth and helping their guts work correctly.

Your rabbit's diet should mimic that of its wild cousins: the main bulk of the diet consists of munching grass; along with nibbling tasty plants and herbs; and, browsing trees and shrubs. Wild rabbits can cause a lot of damage from this! That bulk of your own rabbit's diet should reflect this.

If your garden is safe, you could let your rabbit roam free to browse and graze, but it depends how much you value your garden - it will help with the mowing!

Rabbits eat large amounts of grass so you will likely need to give your rabbit a fresh patch daily if they cannot free-range. If you are pulling up grass from verges/ outside your garden then be aware that it is possible to transmit diseases such as rabbit haemorrhagic disease. This is unlikely to be removed with washing. Vaccination can help with protection as appropriate. Do not feed grass cuttings as these start fermenting quickly and upset a rabbit's digestion.

Hay should be fed alongside grass for choice, but is most important when grass is in short supply, or, for a house rabbit.

Hay is easy to come by, but not all hay is equal. Hay is available as 'bedding hay' but this is often cheap hay which is brown in colour, dusty, not sweet smelling and not appetising for the rabbit. Hay for eating may cost a bit more, but is better tasting, more nutritious and less likely to be wasted. This is not hay to use for bedding. For regular feeding look for timothy hay or meadow hay. Hay can vary depending on the weather so even if you buy from the same source, it may vary in quality and palatability. You can purchase expensive brands of hay of excellent and consistent quality, but these are usually imported from countries such as America. Some rabbits may like one type but not another. They can be fussy and they may need variety. You will also find green-oat hay, barn-dried grass as other options for fussy eaters or for variety in a diet. Alfalfa hay (lucerne) is only suitable as an infrequent treat: it is high in protein (which can be fattening) and higher in calcium than alternatives.

I could end there, but I can hear you asking what about fruit, vegetables and hard food? Well I only asked you to remember one thing about a rabbit's diet and that is that they eat grass and hay! The nutrient content of hay can vary depending on soil type, weather, time of year and other factors. Supplementing your rabbit's diet with a good selection of plants and a small amount of hard food is essential to meet all its nutritional requirements. The wild rabbit would eat a range of foods to meet its nutritional needs, so a varied diet is good for your pet rabbit.

Your rabbit will love a selection of fruit and vegetables. Try and stick to leafy green parts, rather than too much of the fruity bits i.e. carrot tops more than the carrot itself: the fruity parts are high in sugars. Free-ranging rabbits will already be able to browse a variety of plants. For those that can't, then providing a mix of plants and cutting branches at different times of the year e.g. willow or apple, will give it something tasty to chew and allow for some natural behaviour. The link below gives some links for safe plants to feed as well as things to avoid. Remember to introduce any new food in small quantities and not all rabbits will like everything that is safe to eat. Learn to know what your rabbit likes and dislikes. Why not try growing some extra plants for your rabbit?

<https://www.harcourt-brown.co.uk/gallery/Rabbit%20food>

Finally we will move on to hard food. This is what most people think of when you ask what to feed your rabbit but it is actually the least important part of the diet. If you feed good quality hay and a good selection of fruit and greens then is it necessary to give hard food too? A little bit of hard food will help make sure you have met your rabbit's nutritional requirements but may not always be necessary.

When I talk about 'hard food' I mean what is called 'rabbit food'. This either comes in a 'muesli' form or a pellet form. Unfortunately rabbit 'muesli' is like feeding a rabbit on chocolate bars. It is high in sugars and low in fibre. They love it,



✓ high fibre pellets



NO to rabbit mixes
appealing to humans
bad for bunnies!

but will pick through it and eat all the fattening bits, therefore don't eat a nutritionally complete portion of it. This can lead to a variety of problems such as obesity, gut problems, bone problems and dental problems. Studies have shown this food is not suitable. One large pet food store has withdrawn such mixes from their stores, but it is still too easily obtained. If you are thinking of feeding this food then please read this:

<https://www.harcourt-brown.co.uk/articles/free-food-for-rabbits/the-problem-with-muesli-mixes-1>

The preferred choice for feeding hard food are grass-based extruded pellets, often sold as 'complete' foods e.g. Burgess Supa Rabbit Excel, Science Supreme. They should contain at least 20% fibre and less than 15% protein. They contain all the nutrients a rabbit needs and are high enough in fibre for gut health. They also cannot be selectively eaten. The recommendation is NO MORE than two egg cups per day (about 60g in total) but this should be based on how fat or thin your rabbit is – please book in for a check if you are unsure. If your rabbit is under or overweight, old or sick, then they may need a different amount. For rabbits living outside you may need to feed more in the winter and less in the summer.

<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-diet/rabbit-diet-obesity-commercial-food-treats/>

This may be a lot to take in, but please ask us if you are unsure. You could book a nurse check to see if your rabbit is a healthy weight and get advice on how much to feed; or a vet check if you would like a full health check, or are worried about your rabbits health and eating.

In summary, then feed your rabbit a more natural diet. This should be about 85% Grass and/or hay, 10% leafy greens and 5% (about 1 egg cup daily).

For more information to complement matters discussed:

<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-health/further-reading/body-condition-score/>

<https://www.in.gov/boah/files/Rabbit%20BCS%20rabbits.pdf>

<https://rabbitwelfare.co.uk/rabbit-diet/recommended-vegetables-herbs/>

RABBIT AWARENESS WEEK - 2nd to 10th June 2018

Rabbit Awareness Week (RAW) is an annual event aimed at raising the understanding of the welfare needs of rabbits. One of the big themes being promoted is the education about diet (as Beccy highlights in her article above) is:

Move away from muesli!

We have lots of bunny information, leaflets and food samples at our Settle surgery and during the week our nursing team will be offering courtesy 'Rabbit MOT's'. Please call our reception team if you would like to book your bunny in for one of these free appointments.

Although this special week is there to raise awareness, we do of course prioritise rabbit health throughout the year. If you have any concerns, or just need advice, please do not hesitate to contact us.



Rabbit welfare needs matrix

Welfare need	RED Action needed	AMBER Room to improve	GREEN Great job!
 Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing too small No exercise run Not cleaned often enough Never given extra protection from heat or cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitably sized housing Exercise run not permanently accessible or not big enough More cleaning required Sometimes given extra protection in heat or cold 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitably sized and secure housing Constant access to suitably sized run Ideal cleaning routine Always given extra protection from heat or cold
 Diet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCS of 1 or 5 and weight incorrect Diet unsuitable Water not always available Inappropriate treats (type or amount) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCS of 2 or 4 and weight not quite correct Diet not well balanced between hay, nuggets and greens Fed muesli instead of nuggets Frequently given treats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BCS and weight correct Fed a suitable, balanced diet of hay, nuggets and greens Water always available, changed daily Minimal and healthy treats
 Behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviour causing serious problem for owner Not sociable and difficult to handle No objects to encourage normal behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some problem behaviour that owner would like to change Sociable but not happy being handled Not many objects to allow normal behaviours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sociable and relaxed when handled Objects given and rotated to allow normal behaviours
 Company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept on own with no regular interaction with trusted person Kept with other species e.g. guinea pigs No provisions made if owner away - left in house on own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept on own but with regular interaction with trusted person Lives with another rabbit, but one or both unneutered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept in pair/small neutered group of same species Good provisions made if owner away
 Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Untreated health problems Not vaccinated or has lapsed Not neutered and kept in mixed group Infestation of parasites Teeth overgrown and causing problems Bottom unchecked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not neutered Evidence of parasites Teeth starting to become overgrown Vaccinations overdue by less than 6 months Bottom sometimes checked in warm weather 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall health good Neutered No evidence of parasites Healthy teeth Vaccinated Bottom checked daily in warm weather

BCS = Body Condition Score

pdsa.org.uk

Registered charity nos. 208217 & 50337585
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pdsa
PETWISE

EXERCISING YOUR PUPPY

We all look forward to the time following vaccinations when we can safely take our new puppy out into the big wide world for a walk and not just play in the garden. Socialisation is such a vital part of your puppy's education that meeting and greeting other dogs and people and experiencing new and varied environments will not only help to make them a better rounded individual, it will also tire them out! Puppies have spurts of boundless energy followed by regular naps. It can be tempting to exercise your puppy during these bouts of energy but it's also important to remember that puppies do not need as much exercise as fully grown dogs and that you can in fact be doing more harm than good.



Over exercising a puppy can actually damage developing joints which may lead to early arthritis. This is the case no matter what the breed but is particularly relevant in larger dogs whose bones and joints are growing rapidly over a short period of time.

A good rule of thumb, and one that we all stick to at the practice is a ratio of five minutes exercise per month of age (up to twice a day) until the puppy is fully grown. This would equate to, for example, 15 minutes (up to twice a day) when three months old; 20 minutes (up to twice a day) when four months old. As stated above, this rule applies to all breeds, no matter how exuberant they may be. Once the puppy is fully grown and joints and bones have fully formed, they can go out for much longer periods of time.

Activities such as playing and running with other dogs are great for socialisation but make sure that this time is within the rule of thumb guidelines - chasing and retrieving objects can be strenuous on growing joints. If your puppy seems bored or full of energy, interact with them by teaching them commands and developing the brain. It is worth noting that mental stimulation in the form of training is far more tiring to your young friend and pays dividends in the long term!

The most important command to train your puppy is that of 'recall' so that you are confident that he will return to you immediately when asked - this could save his life someday so is well worth working on.

It is important that all puppies and dogs go out for exercise every day in a safe and secure area, or they may become frustrated but time spent in the garden (however large) is no substitute for exploring new environments and socialising with other dogs for social and behavioural reasons.

Note: You should never exercise your puppy on a full stomach as this can contribute to bloat.

If you would like any further advice on exercising your puppy, please speak with one of our vets or qualified nurses on 01729 823538. We are happy to help.

Lizzy Elliott



Dalehead Veterinary Group is a trading name of Dalehead Veterinary Group Ltd, a limited company, registered in England and Wales with the number 09445397.

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Check out our website www.daleheadvetgroup.co.uk for more information about caring for your pet, special offers, vet and staff profiles and much more!

