

Hello and welcome to our Autumn newsletter. We hope you enjoyed the long hot summer and are ready to embrace the change of season. As we slip into Autumn it would pay to keep on top of flea treatments as the rain will create humidity, perfect conditions for flea egg larvae development as the warmth continues. For cost effectiveness and efficiency come to the clinic for our range of flea treatments. Have a safe and enjoyable Easter break, keeping the chocolate eggs from your pets!

RABBIT CARE



Rabbits are popular pets, and preventative health care is very important. When correct diet and environment are provided, many common and potentially serious problems can be avoided.

Diet

Rabbits require a very high fibre diet to ensure efficient digestion and prevent dental disease.

- ◆ Hay and grass should form the basis of your rabbit's diet. Rabbits love grass, thistle/ puha, plantain leaves and dock leaves
- ◆ Green leafy veges – about 1 cup/kg/day – dandelion greens/flowers, turnip tops, parsley, bok choy, carrot tops, silverbeet, cabbage.

- ◆ Clean drinking water must always be available.

Pellets are not essential and should only comprise about 10-20% of the diet or about 1/8th cup/kg/day. They are high in calories and do not provide enough fibre. They are also better fed in 'treat balls' to provide some mental and physical exercise.

Treats such as carrots, apple, pear and berries should be no more than 1 teaspoon/kg/day.

Rabbits should **not** be offered cereals, grains, bread, biscuits, crackers etc.

Vaccination

Rabbit calicivirus disease is also known as haemorrhagic viral disease. This virus is highly infectious and is spread by ingestion or breathing in virus from infected faeces or urine. Insects can also carry the virus as can your shoes or clothing, so isolation from other rabbits is not enough to prevent your rabbit from the disease. Rabbits in good health need to be vaccinated against calicivirus (RHD).

Teeth

Rabbits' teeth grow throughout their lives and dental problems are common. Make sure you provide your rabbits with adequate chewing material. Branches from trees such as willow, apple, pear, poplar and citrus or other untreated wood treats will keep their teeth worn down. Avoid trees which have been chemically treated. Any reluctance to eat or drooling may indicate a dental problem that should be checked out by a vet.

Do Not Feed

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------|
| •Avocado | •Lilies |
| •Beans | •Mushrooms |
| •Buttercup | •Nightshade |
| •Cereals | •Nuts •Oats |
| •Corn on the cob | •Potatoes |
| •Daffodil | •Privet |
| •Foxglove | •Rhubarb |
| •Hemlock | •Seeds |
| •Iceberg lettuce | •Snowdrops |
| •Jasmine | •Sweet peas |
| •Kidney beans | •Wheat or grain |
| •Leaves from evergreen trees | |

Grooming Rabbits should be checked daily and have a full hands-on checkover once or twice a week. Long-haired/fluffy rabbits need to be groomed several times a week and this should start at an early age. If the fur is left to become badly knotted, our nurses can clip under sedation which can be an expensive (\$200+) haircut!

Rabbits' nails need clipping regularly (about once every six to eight weeks). Ask your vet to show you how, as you can easily cut through the blood vessel.

Droppings Rabbits have two sorts of droppings – hard fibrous pellets and soft green caecotropes. Rabbits will re-ingest their caecotropes but usually do this at night. This is a normal and important part of a rabbit's digestion and does not indicate ill health.

CONSULT YOUR VET IF YOU SEE:

- A large number of soft green caecal pellets in the cage
- Diarrhoea
- Your rabbit's head tilting, any circling or wobbling
- Maggots anywhere on your rabbit
- Sneezing or nasal discharge
- Excessive scratching
- Wounds
- Blood or mucus in urine or droppings
- Worms in droppings
- Sore or bald hocks
- Overgrown teeth or nails



CHICKEN HEALTH

Chickens can make great pets, they can be very social animals, and will usually bond easily with you once they know you are the one who provides the food!

The average lifespan of a chicken is 8-15 years, so you will need to be committed to their regular daily care and attention. They are dependent on you to provide food, water, medical care and shelter.

Housing

Even if chickens are "free-range", they like to have a clean, safe area for laying their eggs and spending the night. A good hen house has a night compartment and a coop. The size depends on the quantity and the size of chickens. For example, approximately 2-3 bantams per square metre.

Location of the hen house is important - chickens need protection from all-day sun and heat, wind and rain. Good ventilation is important. Chickens can bear some cold as long as there's no draft or high moisture content in the air. In fact, chickens can bear the cold better than heat.

Most breeds (but not all) like to be able to perch at night. The night compartment must be cleaned regularly, therefore a height that you can reach easily is recommended. Cleaning will be required on a weekly to monthly basis depending on the number and size of chickens. Protection from predators such as rats, wild birds, dogs and cats is also an important function of the hen house and coop.

Feeding

Free-range chickens gather some of their own food; seeds, berries, plants, worms, snails, insects etc. However, it is recommended that a good quality commercial mix is also fed. These mixes provide the right balance of nutrients necessary for good production. Grit is important for laying hens.

Always feed according to the instructions on the bag. Overweight hens don't lay well so don't overfeed them. Always store the food dry and make sure no vermin can reach it.

FRESH water is a must. Check the supply every day and regularly clean the water container. Use a container that chickens can't tip over.

Basic Disease Management

Prevention is always best. Check your chickens regularly as illness and death can strike very rapidly.

- Reduced food and/or water intake, reduced production, changes in behaviour or activity levels, abnormal feathers and/or droppings can be signs of more serious issues.
- Illness in chickens is often related to environmental conditions such as mouldy food, boredom, high temperatures or overpopulation.
- Diseases caused by organisms can include; coccidiosis, worms, mites, lice, fleas, as well as bacterial and viral infections.
- It is recommended to worm poultry at least 2 times per year.

Keeping your chickens water clean and free of droppings, bedding clean/fresh, and making sure they are getting good nutrition is a great way to avoid problems.

Don't hesitate to call us if concerned. Whilst a visit to our vets might cost you more than the chicken, it might save the rest of your chickens at home and mean that you can continue to enjoy the pleasures of chicken ownership in the future.



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RAT BAIT!

It's that time of year when rats and mice start migrating into buildings to seek warmth. Many people will lay poisonous baits, and unfortunately we are seeing the usual autumn increase in rat bait poisonings.

We urge you to **use a proper bait station which is pet-proof**, and secure the storage place. Most baits act by stopping the blood from clotting, leading the animal to bleed to death. The treatment is long and expensive. Secondary poisoning from eating dead rats and mice is unusual as the number required to cause illness is large compared with direct ingestion.



The symptoms vary depending on where the bleeding is occurring:

- There may be blood in the urine or faeces
- Blood in the saliva or small haemorrhages in the gums
- Rapid breathing or a cough due to haemorrhage in the lungs
- Lethargy or poor exercise tolerance

If you suspect your pet has eaten bait, treating with an emetic to induce vomiting is important - and needs to be done ASAP! Contact the clinic and arrange to see your vet for further treatment.

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