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FAQ: Chewing

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Introduction

Why does your rabbit chew things other than her meals? Chewing is a normal, natural, necessary (and highly enjoyable) activity for rabbits. Here is an outline of some considerations to help you understand the why of chewing, as well as the how of preventing destruction of your favorite wicker furniture.

What are the psychological factors of chewing?

Sex. Females often have a stronger urge to burrow than males, although this is not the only reason rabbits chew. The hormone/age factors below also apply to males. Both males and females can and should be spayed or neutered as soon as they are sexually mature (3 1/2 to 6 mos. old).

Hormone/age. Is she spayed?

- If young (under 2 yr..) & unspayed, spay her.
- If young & spayed, her chewing will lessen with time.
- If mature (over 2 yrs.) & unspayed, spay her but get a checkup first.
- If mature & spayed, her behavior isn't governed by hormones.

Remember, a spayed rabbit will chew less and less as she matures. It may be just a matter of riding out a high energy stage of your bunny's life.

Personality. Chewers are often intelligent, outgoing, affectionate individuals who like to be in charge and get lots of attention. Does she chew to get attention? Would a companion alleviate boredom? Anything that would entertain her/make her happier might lessen her chewing.

What are the environmental factors of chewing?

Diversions: keep trying to find something harmless she enjoys doing. What kind of "burrow" (such as a cardboard box stuffed with hay), can you provide for her?

Protecting the environment: A box or wire basket can go over a group of wires. Browse a large hardware store for products to use for bunnyproofing.

Confinement (to a cage or room). This simply buys you time, while you bunny-proof, get her spayed, or wait for her to mature.

Should I give the rabbit items to chew?

Yes. You can give rabbits pieces of the thing they want to chew: their own small towel, for example, providing they aren't ingesting it. This is especially useful when the attraction is the particular consistency.

Here are some items that are OK for rabbits to chew on:

- apple, willow, aspen branches;
- pine firewood;
- cotton towels
- untreated fresh pine lumber attached to cage so it doesn't move--piece of molding, 1"x2"s, or 2"x4"s;
- basket with hay in it--let the bun chew the basket as well as the hay;
- compressed alfalfa cubes

Aren't some woods toxic?

Fruit tree branches, such as, apricot and peach are toxic while attached to the tree but not after they're cut and dried (a month or more). Lisa McSherry and Rusty Fayter, who package The Busy Bunny baskets, share this research. Another tip they offer for your bunny's safety is to keep your purchases of imported baskets limited to willow, the only basket material not sprayed with pesticide.

Does chewing carpet hurt the rabbit?

Yes, if then ingest the fiber. Since swallowing indigestible such as carpet presents a health hazard to your bunny, follow up excessive chewing incidents with a petroleum laxative such as Petromalt or Laxatone (sold at pet- supply stores).

Should I give the rabbit items to dig?

Yes. For digging, build a "tunnel" (top isn't needed, just bottom, high sides, and end. Cover the bottom with a bit of carpet or something similar. Bunnies LOVE to dig at the end of tunnels. (Same thing can be accomplished by putting a board with carpet tacked on between two pieces of heavy furniture against the wall...just be sure the board can't move or the bun will be digging the carpet beneath where the board was meant to be.

Can I discipline my rabbit not to chew?

Discipline (clapping hands, saying "no") has a small role in stopping chewing behavior. Most people report that it's easy to make their bunnies understand them, but difficult to make them stop the behavior through the use of discipline only, especially if the bunnies are left alone for periods of time. [Section 7](#) of this FAQ covers general companion rabbit training techniques.



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