

House Rabbit Society
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Living with a House Rabbit

Why a House Rabbit?

Perhaps you've just [adopted](#) your first rabbit, or maybe you already have a rabbit and would like more information to help you understand her better. The [House Rabbit Society](#), a national nonprofit organization, recommends that you keep your rabbit in the house rather than [outdoors](#). Rabbits are intelligent, social animals who need affection, and they can become wonderful companion animals if given a chance to interact with their human families.

The benefits of spay and neuter

Although most rabbits will use a [litterbox](#), hormones may cause unneutered males and unspayed females to "mark territory." [Spaying or neutering](#) your rabbit improves litterbox habits, lessens [chewing behavior](#), decreases territorial [aggression](#), and gives your rabbit a happier, longer life. Have your rabbit neutered between ages 3 1/2 to 6 months, depending on sexual maturity, by an [experienced rabbit veterinarian](#).

For rabbits more than 2 years old, get a [veterinary checkup](#) first.

Housetraining

Rabbits may have free run of the home. However, it's best for most--and necessary for some--to start with a [cage](#). To make cage time learning time, fasten a litterbox in the corner of the cage that your rabbit chooses for a "bathroom." As soon as he uses the box consistently, you can give him some freedom. Place one or more large litterboxes in corners of the running area outside the cage.

Use only [positive reinforcement](#) (treats and praise)--never punishment.

Bunny-proofing

[Bunny-proofing](#) your home is part of living with a house rabbit. It is natural for rabbits to [chew](#) on furniture, rugs, drapes, and, most deadly of all, electrical cords. Cords must be concealed so that the rabbit cannot reach them. Exposed cords can be encased in vinyl tubing (found at hardware stores). By splitting the tubing lengthwise with a utility knife the cord can be pushed inside it.

Give your rabbit enough attention, [safe chewables](#), and [toys](#), so that she is distracted from chewing furniture and rugs. A cardboard box stuffed with hay makes an inexpensive playbox. Young rabbits (under a year) are more inclined to mischief and require more confinement and/or bunny-proofing than mature rabbits.

House rabbits and other animals

House rabbits and indoor [cats](#) can get along fine, as do rabbits and well-mannered [dogs](#). Dogs should be trained to respond to commands before being trusted with a free-running rabbit, and supervision is needed to control a dog's playful impulses (this is especially true for puppies). [Adding a second rabbit](#) is easiest if the rabbits are neutered adults of opposite sexes, and they are [introduced](#) for short periods in an area unfamiliar to both rabbits.

Major Health Problems

Intestinal blockages: Because rabbits groom themselves constantly, they get furballs just as cats do. Unlike cats, however, rabbits cannot vomit, and excessive swallowed hair may cause a fatal blockage. Rabbits can also develop a serious condition known as [GI stasis](#) which has many of the same symptoms.

If your rabbit shows a decrease in appetite and in the size of droppings, get advice from a [rabbit veterinarian](#).

Prevention: keep bunny [brushed](#) (less hair is swallowed); provide exercise time/space--at least 30

hours a week; give a fresh handful of hay daily; add fresh vegetables gradually to the diet; give petroleum laxatives during a heavy molt or if synthetics have been swallowed.

Bacterial balance: A rabbit's digestive tract is inhabited by healthful bacteria. If the "good" bacteria balance is upset by stale food or a sudden change in diet, harmful bacteria can take over the digestive track and kill the rabbit.

Prevention: Keep all rabbit food in a cool dry place and make [dietary changes](#) slowly, giving a new food in small amounts. If no abdominal gurgling or loose stool results in 24 hours, the food may be offered again. If your rabbit goes outside, check for pesticides and toxic plants. (A list is available from your local poison center.)

Infectious bacteria: Many rabbit diseases are caused by bacteria, not viruses, and can be treated with antibiotics. If your rabbit shows symptoms of a "cold," take him to a veterinarian familiar with antibiotics that can be safely used in rabbits. Oral drugs of the Penicillin family, such as Amoxicillin, should NOT be given to a rabbit, since there is risk of destroying good intestinal bacteria.

It's up to you

Find an [experienced rabbit doctor](#) before a problem develops. If your rabbit has been harassed by a predator, take him to a veterinarian even if no injuries are apparent. When it is over, keep your rabbit cool with nearby wet towels or ice.

Regularly check eyes, nose, ears, teeth, weight, appetite, and droppings.

Danger Signs

Don't waste valuable time Call your veterinarian immediately if you see:

- Diarrhea with listlessness
- Sudden loss of appetite with bloat and abdominal gurgling
- Loss of appetite with labored breathing
- Loss of appetite with runny nose
- Head tilt
- Incontinence (urine-soaked rear legs)
- Abscesses, lumps or swellings anywhere
- Any sudden behavior change

Have List

HOUSING

- Roomy cage
- Resting board
- Litterbox (in cage)
- Pellet bowl or feeder
- Water bottle/crock
- Toys (chew & toss)
- Pet carrier

RUNNING SPACE

- Indoors:
- Bunny-proofed room(s)
- Litterbox
- Toys (chew & dig)

Outdoors:
Fenced patio/porch/playpen (with floor)

CONSUMABLES

Limited pellets daily
Fresh water
Hay /straw (for digestive fiber and chewing recreation)
Fresh salad veggies/fruit (add gradually)
Barley/oats (*verysmall* amounts)
Wood (for chewing recreation)
Multiple enzymes (digestive aid)
Petroleum laxative (when needed for passing hair)

GROOMING

Flea comb
Brush
Flea products safe for rabbits (*no Frontline!*)
Toenail clippers

SUPPLIES

Dust-free litter (not wood shavings)
Pooper scooper
Whiskbroom/dustpan
White vinegar (for urine accidents)
Hand vacuum
Chlorine bleach (for disinfecting)
Newspapers

More info needed?

Our web site contains all the information you might need on [bunny-proofing](#), [house-training](#), [handling](#), introducing two rabbits, spaying and neutering, and locating rabbit veterinarians.



House Rabbit Society is a nonprofit rescue and education group.
We welcome your [feedback](#) and appreciate your [donations](#). Please [join](#) today!

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