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FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PET RABBITS

Why is diet so important?

- Feeding is perhaps the single **most important factor** in maintaining a healthy rabbit
- In the wild **rabbits eat grass!** They may graze for 6-8 hours plus per day. Their whole digestive tract - from teeth to gut's end is adapted to this diet & eating habit
- Rabbit **teeth grow continuously** throughout life. They depend on their diet to help wear down their teeth & keep all their teeth in good shape. Without healthy teeth a rabbit will not lead a happy & healthy life
- Rabbits are also naturally 'coprophagic', meaning they eat some of their own droppings. They need to do this in order to keep themselves and their digestive tract healthy
- Many commercial 'rabbit' foods **do NOT contain enough fibre**, which is essential to good pet rabbit health. The fibre content of your pet rabbit's diet should be greater than 18-20%

Feeding

- **Staple Diet:** Keep it simple. Provide them with a 'Hay and Veggies' diet.
- **Give them hay** - Provide your rabbits with a **constant supply** of good quality **fresh grass or grass hay** eg; Timothy, Oaten, Wheaten, Pasture, Paddock, Meadow or Ryegrass hays. (Not Lucerne or clover hays as they are too high in protein and calcium). This is paramount in providing the 'complete' diet and encourages 'chewing' for long periods of time. Hay or grass should comprise 80% of their diet.
- **Veggies are good too** - Feed fresh leafy greens & vegetables. As a guide, feed around 2 packed cups of leafy greens per kg body weight (at least 3 different varieties) per day, some examples are;
Veggies: broccoli, cabbage, celery, endive, beet/carrot tops, brussels sprouts, spinach leaves, Bok Choy, other Asian greens, dark leafed lettuce varieties
Herbs: parsley, dandelion, coriander, basil, dill, mint, etc

- **What about treats?** Treats may be offered in small quantities (only 1-2 tablespoons per rabbit per day!) Some examples are; most fruits, root vegetables (carrot, sweet potato), capsicum

- **No-Nos!** (these should not be offered to pet rabbits). Cereals, grains, nuts, seeds, corn, beans, peas, breads, biscuits, sweets, sugar, breakfast cereals, chocolate!

Other Important Points

- Rabbits should **NOT be fed solely on 'pellets' or 'mixes'**. Many commercial rabbit pellets do not meet the nutritional analysis as set out below. If pellets are offered, consider them as treats. They should only be offered in treat quantities. There are however some very good products such as 'Oxbow' rabbit pellets making their way onto the Australian market.
- Try to keep feeds & **feeding habits consistent**. Any changes made should be made gradually (over a 2-3 week period) to minimise digestive upsets
- Other supplements, salt licks, etc aren't necessary
- Providing other **objects to chew on** is also a good idea, try offering items such as wooden chew blocks, old telephone books, etc. If their hutch is of wooden construction it may be chewed, so beware!
- Always have **fresh clean water** available. For young rabbits, provide them with 'sipper' type water bottles. Adult rabbits are best offered water bowls as well as water bottles
- If possible, allow rabbits to have access to **natural unfiltered sunlight**, UV light is an important factor in their Vitamin D metabolism

Suggested Pet Rabbit food analysis

Crude fibre	>18% (Indigestible fibre component >12.5%)	Phosphorus	0.4-0.8%
Protein	12-16%	Vit A	10,000-18,000 IU/kg
Fat	1-4%	Vit D	800-1200 IU/kg
Calcium	0.6-1.0%	Vit E	40-70mg/kg

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