



# Feeding your rabbit a healthy diet

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## What should I feed my rabbit?

The best diet for rabbits is one that mimics as closely as possible the grass-based diet that wild rabbits evolved to eat. Grass and/or hay should form the bulk of the diet and be available at all times. Grass and hay are essential to keep your rabbit's teeth and digestive system healthy. Grass/hay intake will be reduced if too much commercial rabbit food is offered; this can lead to obesity, dental disease, digestive disease, boredom and behavioural problems. If the correct diet is fed, vitamin and mineral supplementation is generally not required.

- 1. Grass-based food.** At least 80% of your rabbit's diet should be made up of good quality hay or fresh growing grass. A rabbit should eat a pile of hay equal in size to its own body (if not more) each day. Hay should be good quality (e.g. timothy); check it is clean, sweet smelling and not dusty or mouldy. Grass should be hand-picked, or the rabbit should be allowed to graze daily. Do not use lawnmower cuttings as the crushing and heat of the grass produced by the lawnmower causes it to start fermenting, which can lead to serious digestive problems and can even be fatal.
- 2. Leafy green weeds and vegetables.** Feed a handful once a day. Good leafy greens are dandelions, brambles, dock, cabbage, watercress, rocket, mixed salad leaves (not iceberg lettuce because this has poor nutritional value and may cause diarrhoea), broccoli, carrot tops, kale, basil, coriander, parsley, spring greens and spinach. All green foods must be washed before being fed to your rabbit.
- 3. No more than 25 g of commercial rabbit food per kilogram bodyweight per day.** This is about 1 tablespoon a day for dwarf and medium rabbit breeds. Neutered rabbits and those with limited exercise opportunities can require considerably less than this. Feed a good quality high-fibre pellet or nugget. Muesli-type diets increase the risk of dental disease and if the rabbit does not eat all the components it will not have a balanced diet.

## How do I know if my rabbit is eating well?

Your vet or vet nurse can show you how to weigh your rabbit regularly and assess their body condition (body condition score, BCS). The quantity of commercial rabbit food should be adjusted to maintain an ideal weight.

### Appetite

Reduced eating can be caused by many things, including pain, dental problems or fear (e.g. getting a fright from a neighbour's cat or a fox). If a rabbit stops eating, the gut will slow down and could even stop working, which can be very serious and even life-threatening. Please contact your vet if you notice changes or a reduction in appetite, especially if your rabbit hasn't eaten for more than 12 hours.

### Droppings

Your rabbit should pass formed, firm droppings about the size of large peas (slightly larger for large rabbits). These should be passed frequently throughout the day. Any changes in quantity, consistency and frequency of droppings could be a sign of illness and should be addressed as soon as possible. **Please contact your vet if your rabbit has passed few or no droppings in 24 hours, if the droppings are very small, dry and hard or are very runny or sticky.**

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