

DIETARY ADVICE FOR RABBITS

It is important that the diet of your rabbit is as close to that of wild rabbits as possible, in order to keep the teeth healthy. The teeth of rabbits grow constantly and need to be kept short by constant grinding. When a rabbit is eating only grass or hay, this keeps the teeth in excellent condition, at the right length and with just the right amount of calcium and minerals. When rabbits are given commercial rabbit food, several things happen.

1. The diet is too high in energy and is the equivalent of you eating a chocolate bar before your main meal. This means that it suppresses the appetite for hay and grass and not enough is eaten to keep the teeth ground down. The pellets do not need much tooth-grinding and are easily crushed in the mouth. In addition the rabbit becomes overweight. The rabbit will always prefer commercial food because it is tasty so the only way to encourage your rabbit to eat enough hay is to reduce the amount of commercial food.
2. If fed on the muesli type food, the rabbit will pick out the bits it likes and leave the bits containing all the calcium. Over a period of time, calcium deficiency will result in the back teeth becoming malformed.
3. Malformed teeth combined with overgrowth of molars due to not eating enough hay, results in worsening dental disease. 50% of pet rabbits suffer as a result of this and many need to be put to sleep or die as a result.
4. The bacteria in the gut, which are essential for digestion, change as a result of the commercial food and make it much more likely that the rabbit will suffer from a life-threatening gut problem.

In order to prevent all these problems, we recommend the following.

1. Feed a maximum of one teaspoonful of commercial food per rabbit. This should be of the pelleted kind to avoid selective feeding. If after a period of 2 weeks on this food, your rabbit is not getting very thin, you may cut out all commercial food.
2. Feed unlimited amounts of hay and grass. Timothy hay is the best as it is more abrasive than other types and requires a lot more grinding.
3. Feed a small handful of leafy green veg such as curly kale, spring greens and broccoli for added calcium. Carrots and other root vegetables should only be used as treats and then sparingly as they are too high in carbohydrate. Fruit, bread etc should never be given.

For further information and advice, please contact the practice. Here we offer a service for rabbits which are already suffering from dental disease and can clip molar teeth if necessary without a general anaesthetic.