

## **RABBIT CARE**

The following information is provided to give you guidelines on how best to provide care for your rabbit. Please do not hesitate to ask for any further information you require.

### **HOUSING**

We always recommend keeping rabbits in pairs, for company. Rabbits should not be kept with guinea pigs as this can result in distress, injury and disease to either or both animals. The hutch provided should be as large as possible to allow the animals to exercise freely and there should be access to a run provided for much of the day. Even indoor rabbits need to have some outdoor access daily in order to produce vitamin D from sunlight and help with calcium absorption (important for healthy teeth and bones). Runs should be secure on all aspects from predators and provide shelter from rain, wind and sun. An ideal set-up is a large multi-level hutch or shed with permanent access to the run for the rabbits during the daytime and secured at night to prevent attack from foxes etc. In cold weather a heavy rug or carpet can be placed over the hutch for extra insulation or the hutch moved into a garage or shed.

### **VACCINATIONS**

Your rabbit needs to be regularly vaccinated throughout life, even if kept indoors. Contagious diseases are transmitted by biting insects such as fleas and flies and can affect house rabbits as well as those kept outdoors.

Myxomatosis is the most common disease and causes immense suffering. There is no treatment and it is almost always fatal. We also vaccinate against viral haemorrhagic disease strain 1 (VHD1) which is another deadly disease with no treatment. The vaccine covers both infections and lasts for 12 months.

A new and more aggressive strain of VHD (VHD2) has recently entered the UK from Europe and is NOT covered by the usual vaccinations. Protection against can be provided by an additional vaccine which is given every 6 months.

We strongly advise that all rabbits are protected with all 3 vaccinations every year. Once vaccinated, we will send out reminders for booster vaccinations as required, but we always recommend keeping a note at home yourself as the post can be unreliable.

## **FLEAS/ FLIES**

Flea control can be expensive for rabbits but disease in rabbits and we can provide protection with 2 products both in spot-on form. Advantage is applied weekly and Xenex, which also kills flies, lice and ticks, is applied fortnightly. Flies can lay eggs on rabbits, particularly if they are overweight or kept in dirty conditions, resulting in attack from maggots, or fly strike. Fly strike can be prevented with a liquid called Rearguard applied once every 10 weeks or with Xenex spot-on every 2 weeks. It may be a good idea to use these products as a preventative in the spring and summer months. Please ask the vet to discuss this with you.

## **NEUTERING**

Neutering is important to help prevent aggression and unwanted mating in both male and female rabbits. Keeping rabbits in pairs is much better for their happiness and welfare than keeping them singly but this is only possible if BOTH rabbits are neutered as they will fight and/ or mate otherwise. Even single females benefit from being speyed as 60% of female rabbits will develop cancer of the uterus by the time they are 5 years old. Speying completely removes this risk and is now a routine procedure for rabbits. We advise neutering from as young as 12 weeks of age.

## **INSURANCE**

We strongly recommend pet insurance. It enables us to provide the best level of care for your rabbit. Although pet insurance does not cover preventative healthcare treatments such as vaccinations and neutering, it does cover illnesses or accidents that may affect your rabbit throughout his/her life. We can offer very advanced surgery and medicine either here or at a specialist practice, should it be required. Intensive care, abscess removal, pinning of fractures, spinal surgery are all possible, but can be extremely expensive, as can be lifetime conditions such as dental disease. Having a good insurance policy means that you do not have to consider cost when deciding on the best treatment options for a pet.

There are now many insurance policies on offer. However, please remember that the cheapest policy does not usually mean the best policy. Therefore it is wise to 'shop around' but to look at policies carefully to make sure you get the most satisfactory level of cover. We recommend Pet Plan policies as they offer the best cover- a minimum of £2000 per year for every year of your pet's life. Other policies usually only cover each condition for a year (12 month cover) or sometimes up to a limited amount of money (maximum benefit cover), which is rarely enough for the lifetime of the animal.

We offer a 4 week insurance policy for animals less than 12 months, free of charge with Pet Plan. There is no money or credit card details required and if you do not choose to continue the policy, you can just say no. However, the policy gives you up to £4000 instant cover for illness or injury (excluding excess) and allows Pet Plan to give you a quote for insurance premiums for your animal. If you keep the policy going, anything for which you have made a claim will remain covered.

Please ask us for more advice. Leaflets are also available in the waiting room.

### **FINALLY.....**

We at The Oaks hope that you have found this leaflet useful. We are here to help you give your rabbit the best start in life and maintain health and wellbeing throughout their life. So, if you have any more questions or queries, do not hesitate to ask one of our members of staff who will be happy to help.