

ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

RABBIT HEALTH

Condition of Skin and Coat

A soft, shiny coat is an indicator of good health. As part of the tune-up, run your hands through the rabbit's fur. Check for any skin irritations, loss of fur and fleas or fur mites. Fur mites can be detected by white scabs or crusty skin, but those things could also be dandruff. Rabbits shed about three times a year and some enjoy a gentle brushing. Long-haired rabbits need brushing frequently because their fur grows fast and quickly forms mats if it isn't brushed. Bunnies have very sensitive skin, so use extreme caution when cutting out matted fur. The skin should be free from cuts, scratches, abrasions, lumps and bumps.



Behaviour and posture

Rabbits are generally very active and sociable animals. A rabbit may hop or dance as a sign of pure joy and happiness. The bunny's "dancing" can include leaping, doing a binky (jumping straight up and spinning in the air), and racing around. Rabbits are active animals needing regular, frequent exercise ideally with access to a large area during their most active periods (early morning, late afternoon and overnight) when they like to graze, forage and be sociable. A healthy rabbit will groom itself thoroughly several times a day. Bonded rabbits will often groom each other as a sign of affection and your rabbit may even "groom" you by licking your hands or face.

A rabbit will rub the underside of its chin against something to mark it with its scent and claim their territory. A rabbit will thump a hind foot on the ground when it feels there is danger around, to warn other rabbits.

A rabbit that is lethargic and showing a lack of interest in its surroundings could have an illness and will need to be seen by a vet.

Appetite and water intake

The bulk of a rabbit's natural diet should consist of good quality hay or grass (but not fresh lawn clippings as they can ferment quickly) measured to the equivalent of their body size. Fresh hay is an essential part of a rabbit's diet, and you need to provide a constant supply of enough hay for your rabbit to graze on. Chewing hay is good for a rabbit's teeth, which keep growing throughout their life and need to be worn down naturally. The rest of their diet can be made up of fresh leafy greens which should be provided every morning and evening. Rabbits eat a variety of vegetables and greens, and we recommend around one handful (adult-sized) per day. Rabbits enjoy spending time foraging, so they enjoy a mix of this kind of food daily which can help prevent boredom, keep them engaged and make their habitat more interesting.

Rabbits require more water than comparable species. For example, in one day a 5-pound rabbit drinks as much water as a 24-pound dog. In fact, the average rabbit consumes between 50 and 150 millilitres of water per kilogram of body weight per day. A rabbit that has stopped eating and drinking should be seen by a vet.

Movement

Using their powerful hind legs, rabbits move by hopping. They have 4 toes on their hind feet that are long and webbed to keep them from spreading apart as they jump. Their front paws have 5 toes each. Some species of rabbit can reach speeds of 35 to 45 miles per hour (56 to 72 kilometres per hour). Young rabbits seem to walk instead of hop. Rabbits are active and enjoy a good amount of exercise every day. A rabbit that is lethargic or lying down a lot could have an illness and should be seen by a vet.

Condition of eyes, ears, nose and mouth

Eyes

Healthy rabbit eyes are clear and bright. If you pull up or down on the eyelid, the eye tissue should be pink, not red or very pale. Red, inflamed eye tissue and/or discharge from the eyes could be a sign of infection. Very pale tissue can also be a sign of illness. Also, rabbits have a "third eyelid," a thin white membrane that protects the eye. If this third eyelid is prominent, it could mean that the rabbit is stressed.

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Ears

A rabbit's ears should be free of wounds, lumps, excess wax, discharge and brown or white material. They should also be free of dirt. A dark crusty material may mean the rabbit has ear mites and needs treatment from a veterinarian. If the ears need a general cleaning, use warm water or saline solution and a gauze or cotton pad to gently wipe out the ears.

Nose

A rabbit's nose should be free from discharge. If you do see discharge from the nose, consult with your veterinarian. Rabbits wipe their noses on the inside of their front paws, so also check the front paws for crustiness or wetness.

Mouth

If the top teeth are very long and growing over the lower teeth, your rabbit's teeth are maloccluded, which means there's an abnormality in the way the teeth come together. The rabbit needs to see a veterinarian to have his teeth trimmed or possibly removed. Maloccluded teeth can make it hard for a rabbit to eat and drink, potentially resulting in significant health problems. Bumps or painful spots in the mouth could indicate an abscess.

Appearance of urine and faeces

Normal rabbit urine will vary from a pale yellow or clear colour, through various orange and brown colours, right up to a deep red colour. Rabbit urine may also look cloudy due to the presence of calcium carbonate being excreted within the urine. Rabbit's pass excess calcium along with their urine. But if the pee looks excessively cloudy or murky, that is a sign of a more serious bladder condition. Golden, amber, red, and clear urine are all possible colours of your rabbits urine. Brown or dark urine typically means your rabbit is a little dehydrated. Healthy rabbit poop can range from about the size of a green pea to around the size of a chickpea (about 7mm – 12mm) in diameter. The poops should all be uniform in size. If there is any drastic difference in the size of the poops, that is cause for concern and an appointment should be made with your rabbit's vet. The colour of normal rabbit poops can range anywhere from a dark brown colour to a more tan, wheat-coloured poop.

Signs of stress or pain that dogs may show

Vocal signs

Growling: Rabbits certainly can growl and it often precedes a lunge and possibly a bite. If the rabbit feels threatened (even by you), they will have no qualms growling and lunging.

Snorting: Snorting can come before or along with growling.

Hissing: This sounds exactly the way you think it does. A hiss is used to ward off other rabbits.

Whining or whimpering: Rabbits will whine or whimper if they do not want to be handled.

Visual signs

Appearing nervous (freezing, hunched up with ears flat against the body), being excessively jumpy and watchful (bulging eyes), being aggressive to people or other rabbits, being aggressive when handled, lethargy and lack of interest in its surroundings, being restless or being very inactive, hiding or trying to run away, breathing heavily, altered feeding or toileting habits, over-grooming, not grooming, showing repeated movements that do not seem to have a purpose, such as biting a water bottle, biting bars, circling or head bobbing.



The procedure to follow if an animal is found to be sick or injured

- Reporting and recording - Report to the manager immediately if a rabbit is sick or injured. A vet may need to be contacted in some cases. Record the illness or injury in the animals records and staff communication book so that all staff members are aware. Record any signs or symptoms, especially anything new relating to the illness or injury.
- Monitoring - Keep a close eye on the rabbit and monitor behaviour, eating and drinking and movement. Check on the sick or injured animal at least every hour and record your findings. Look out for any new symptoms.

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- Isolating - Isolate a sick or injured rabbit in it's own enclosure away from other rabbits to prevent cross-contamination or further injury.
- When to call the vet - Always consult your manager before contacting the vet. Treatment from a vet should never be put off if the rabbit is injured or sick. If you notice severe signs of stress, weight loss, not eating or drinking, not moving or laboured breathing you must contact the vet immediately.

The records kept to help maintain the health of animals

- Age - Knowing the age of a rabbit is important as they will have different requirements and will behave differently at certain ages. Rabbit behaviour changes as they become older so it is important to know the types of behaviour to expect relating to their age.
- Type - The breed of rabbit should be known and recorded for identification purposes. Also different breeds of rabbits behave in different ways and have certain characteristics and temperaments. Different sized breeds may require specific handling equipment depending on the size of rabbit.
- Diet - The type of feed and amount should be recorded so that they are fed the correct quantities and food types needed to keep them healthy. It is also useful to see how much they are eating to check they are in good health and are receiving the correct requirements. If a rabbit has a diet related illness, recording their diet will help to eliminate any foods that maybe making them ill.
- Weight - A rabbits weight should be recorded to ensure there is no drastic weight gain or weight loss as this could indicate a serious health problem that may need addressing. Weight gain and weight loss could lead to illness.
- Comments - Extra information relating to behaviour, sleeping patterns etc. should be added to provide a better understanding of the animals health.

