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What's up Doc?

Last September we unfortunately saw a number of cases of Myxomatosis in our rabbit patients. This year National Rabbit Awareness Week is September 15th-22nd and so our focus this month is on all things Rabbit :o)

Rabbits are great as pets - they are very cheeky, inquisitive, and they all have their own personalities. In the wild they are very territorial with each rabbit having a territory of about 30 tennis courts. They spend the day running around this and eating a huge amount of grass which keeps their teeth in good shape. When we keep them as pets we need to try to copy this natural state with plenty of exercise and lots of fibre in the diet.

They are also very social animals and they do best when they have company of another rabbit. A good combination is a neutered male and a neutered female. Neutering is important as it stops unwanted pregnancies, reduces fighting, and in the female prevents uterine cancer.

When you are looking at building hutches, pay special attention to the bedroom area as this needs to be as big as possible:

- Big enough to lie down and stretch in all directions
- Tall enough for them to stand up on their back legs without their ears hitting the roof.
- Long enough to allow a couple of hops. And all these things for each rabbit.

By far the biggest problems that we see in our clinics are related to poor diet. This affects their teeth, causes digestive problems, and can lead to the dreaded "fly strike" (an infestation of maggots which can be fatal). Generally there are two main problems:

1. Lack of fibre in the diet - rabbits need 2 types of fibre in their diet -digestible and indigestible. The first gives them essential nutrients and the second keeps their digestive system moving efficiently.
2. Feeding muesli-type foods - rabbits can have a sweet tooth and will pick out certain bits of the diet. This imbalance can cause real problems for their teeth, bones, and digestion. In general we advise avoiding muesli food and using high quality pellets instead.

We are great fans of the Rabbit Food Triangle to help keep you right. Imagine a pyramid 3 layers high with each level the same height. The base of the pyramid should be filled with unlimited grass or hay, the middle tier contains fresh vegetables - aim for small amounts of 6 different types daily rather than a big heap of cabbage. Only the top tier should be dry concentrated food like pellets and for an average 2Kg rabbit this should only be 1 tablespoon in summer and 2 in winter!

If you have a pet rabbit and would like to take part in Rabbit Awareness Week please see our website for more details including how to claim a free rabbit examination.

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