

How to introduce rabbits

Rabbits are sociable animals, and where possible should live in pairs or small groups to provide them with the companionship and social interaction that they need.

Traditionally rabbits were often housed with guinea pigs to provide companionship as neutering was considered to be a very risky procedure. Modern anaesthetics and techniques make rabbits' anaesthetics very safe and are considered no more of a risk than for a dog or cat.



At Hillside we don't recommend housing rabbits and guinea pigs together for a number of reasons. It is not uncommon for a guinea pig that has been kept with a rabbit to become injured, either through being kicked by the rabbit, or through being mounted by the rabbit. Rabbits and guinea pigs communicate in very different ways, and their nutritional needs are also different.

We therefore always recommend that rabbits need to have the companionship of other rabbits.

Ideally two rabbits should be introduced when very young (**under 12 weeks old**) as they are much more likely to accept each other and not exhibit territorial behaviour towards each other. However this isn't always possible.

Rabbits make fabulous pets and are lovely sociable animals, but if you keep more than one **neutering** is required. Rabbits are often happier in pairs (or more) and two neutered bucks (males) will often become very closely bonded for life.

If possible, both rabbits should be neutered before they are introduced, or if they are not old enough, as soon as possible. At Hillside, we can advise you on this. Neutering reduces the risk of pregnancies in male and female pairings and can reduce the risk of aggression on introduction. With males in particular, the chances of a successful introduction are greatly increased if they are introduced to each other before they reach sexual maturity at 5-6 months of age.

If you already have a rabbit and are going to be introducing a companion then it's best to have your existing rabbit neutered and then wait a few weeks before getting your second rabbit.

There are several methods of introducing rabbits to each other to minimise the risk of them fighting and to increase the chances of them accepting each other. One method is to start by introducing the rabbits on a large area of neutral territory that is absent of hutches and places to hide, but has food and water available and some toys for them to play with. The rabbits are likely to be suspicious of each other initially and may rush up to each other and

then rush away again. They must be monitored closely at all times (do not leave them alone). If there seems to be no signs of serious biting and scratching then they can be left together but you should continue to watch them closely.

It's important that if they start to fight they must be separated.

When it's time for your rabbits to be shut away again they must be returned to separate hutches, but can be re-introduced on the neutral territory again the following day. This should be repeated for a minimum of 7-10 days before attempting to house them together.

It's a good idea to see whether your rabbits lie together when on neutral territory. If they do then they can be transferred to a hutch together – again monitoring them for a short while. If they do not start to fight then they can be left together for a few hours (whilst keeping an eye on them). If they are still content in each other's company then they should be able to remain together overnight.

Another method of introducing rabbits to each other starts by placing the rabbits in separate hutches or cages but enabling them to sniff each other through the wire. You can then swap litter trays between the two hutches so that the rabbits get used to the smell of each other before going on to introduce them to each other on neutral territory as described above.

It's important to remember with both of these methods that the first sign of any aggression the rabbits should be separated. This does not mean that the rabbits will never be able to live together; some just take more time to get used to each other. Sometimes, unfortunately there are some that will never take to living with another rabbit.

If you would like further advice on introducing rabbits to each other, please feel free to ask for an appointment with one of our nurses for further discussion.



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this website should be construed as medical advice or diagnosis. For specific healthcare advice please discuss the particular symptoms and circumstances of your pet with your vet.