



Purchasing a rabbit

Is this the right time for you to have a rabbit?

Look at your current situation carefully before making the decision of purchasing a rabbit. Is your current family situation suitable for the new arrival? Rabbits are often purchased as pets for young children, but will they actually look after their pet themselves or will the care of the rabbit be left to you? Do you have the time to look after a rabbit?

Have a think about any other pets in the household: rabbits are prey animals, and whilst they can live happily in the same household as a dog or cat, it may not be possible to have rabbits if your other pets are going to spend their time upsetting them by potentially 'hunting' them.

Ask yourself the following questions to see if NOW is the right time for a bunny to be joining your family:

- Can I afford to buy the rabbit I want?
- Can I make a lifelong commitment to a rabbit – the average lifespan of a rabbit is 7-10 years. If you bought the rabbit for your child, they may lose interest in their pet or have left home in this time.
- Can I afford to feed a rabbit a good quality diet?
- Can I afford the veterinary fees? Just like dogs and cats, rabbits require annual vaccinations, neutering, and if they become unwell, treatment may be expensive.
- Can I afford to insure a rabbit? Rabbit medicine has come a long way and more can be done to help rabbits than in the past with specialist treatment being available. This comes at a cost so we always recommend insuring your rabbit at Hillside Vets.
- Is my home suitable for a rabbit? Rabbits can be kept indoors, but you will need to make sure that your house is rabbit proof, and all rabbits require access to a large outdoor run and/or garden for exercise.
- Will there be someone at home for the rabbit? Whilst rabbits can be left on their own, they do require attention and should not be left in their hutch and forgotten at the bottom of the garden. They also enjoy fussing with cuddling and stroking a particular favourite of theirs. They are extremely sociable animals.
- Will I be able to find the time to groom, and generally care for a rabbit?

- Will I be able to answer **YES** to all of these questions every day of the year?

If you answered **no** to any of the above questions, then we would advise you to think carefully before going out and purchasing a rabbit.

What breed should I buy?

A rabbit's character and the care that it needs varies dramatically depending on its *breed*.

For example, owning an Angora bunny is very different to owning a French Lop so you will need to investigate *breeds* before buying a rabbit.

Rabbits vary hugely in size, so the space needed for a giant breed will be considerable more than that needed for a Dwarf Lop. If you are buying the rabbit as a child's pet you will need to look into the breed's temperament as well as the size that it is likely to grow to.

Whilst a very small breed such as a Netherland Dwarf may sound ideal, they are not always easy to handle due to their very small size and can sometimes be aggressive, so a slightly larger breed which generally has a good temperament such as a Dutch may be better.

Some breeds such as Cashmeres and Angoras will also require extensive grooming due to their longer and denser coat, whereas breeds such as the Rex have a coat that is very easy to care for.

The anatomy of some rabbits can also make them more difficult to care for. For example, the English Lop has very long ears which can easily be damaged and could require a lot of attention.

Where should I buy a rabbit from?

It is not recommended to source your rabbit from a pet shop. Whilst there are some that do a great job of ensuring that the animals they sell are in good health, offer correct advice and ensure that they go to suitable homes, unfortunately there are a lot that don't. It's not uncommon for rabbits that have come from pet shops to develop problems shortly after going to their new home. This is often due to stress caused through so many changes in environment and poor diet in such a short period of time.

Rabbits can also be difficult to sex when young, so it is not uncommon for a rabbit which has been sold as a male to actually be a female and vice versa which can lead to unexpected problems - such as unwanted litters.

If you are looking for a specific breed of rabbit you should try finding a reputable breeder at a local rabbit show or through the recommendation of other happy rabbit owners. Rabbit breed clubs may also be able to put you in contact with a local breeder to you. Non-pedigree rabbits are often available locally from someone whose rabbit has had an 'accidental' litter. Also, don't forget rescue centres. They often have large number of

adult and baby rabbits requiring homes. At Hillside we can help point you in the right direction if you are struggling to know where to purchase a rabbit from – just ask one of the team.

What should I be looking for when I go to meet the rabbits?

Meet the mother, the rest of the litter, and if possible, the father of the litter and check the history of any hereditary medical or behavioural problems. If the breeder is reluctant to let you interact with the mother, this usually indicates that the rabbit has temperament issues, which may have been passed on to the babies. It's also wise to check the environment the rabbits are living in – their hutches should be clean with fresh water and food and any older rabbits, as well as the babies, should look bright and healthy.

Should I purchase two rabbits from the same litter?

Rabbits are very sociable animals and require the companionship of others of their own species. Two or more rabbits are most likely to live happily together if they are introduced before they are twelve weeks old, although older rabbits can be introduced, so yes this is a good idea. It will be necessary to neuter both rabbits (see our website 'Pet Guidance – Neutering' and scroll down for further information on neutering your rabbit) regardless of their sex to prevent any unwanted litters and also reduce any aggression that may develop as they mature. Most rabbits can be neutered between the ages of 4-5 months.

What age should I bring the rabbit home?

Most rabbits go to their new homes at around eight weeks old. At that age they will have picked up plenty of social skills from their mother, yet remain receptive to different situations. Be wary of a breeder who says they were keeping the rabbit to 'show' and have only now decided to give him up. The chances are that he has been returned from another home as he was unsuitable for various reasons – these could include inappropriate behaviour traits.

What do I need to find out from the breeder when I bring my rabbit home?

You should ask the breeder if your rabbit has been given any vaccinations and the date on which it was administered. This will enable your vet to ensure that your rabbit is given any additional vaccinations needed at the correct time. You should also receive a vaccination certificate signed by the vet that administered the vaccination giving details of which products were used.

It's important to make any changes to a rabbit's diet gradually and so you need to know from the breeder the type of food your rabbit has been fed, how often, and how much. If possible, find this out before you collect your rabbit so that you can source the same food before your rabbit arrives home.

We are more than happy to discuss purchasing a rabbit with you – just ask for an appointment with Gemma our qualified nurse who has a passion for rabbits and she will be able to give you the best advice possible.

If you do decide to go ahead and purchase a rabbit we look forward to seeing you at Hillside for their check-up and vaccinations if these haven't been carried out (cuddling bunnies is so therapeutic) and we know you will love having them as an addition to your family – enjoy!

Further information

- Owning a rabbit handout
- Preparing for your new rabbit handout
- Feeding your rabbit handout
- How to introduce rabbits
- www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk is the excellent website of the Rabbit Welfare Fund – this site includes a lot of further information about caring for your rabbits.

Disclaimer: Hillside Vets' website is intended to be used only as a guide and information resource, not as an alternative to a veterinary consultation and advice. Nothing contained in 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.