



## **YOUR NEW RABBIT**

**Information and advice from the Oregon Humane Society  
for a happy life with your new pet.**



**OREGON  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY**

503-285-7722 • [www.oregonhumane.org](http://www.oregonhumane.org)



# CONGRATULATIONS!

Thank you for adopting a companion animal from the Oregon Humane Society!  
We especially thank you for taking the time to adopt your new pet from our shelter.  
This booklet is designed to address many of the questions you may have about how to care for your new rabbit. Please give us a call if you need any additional information or advice.

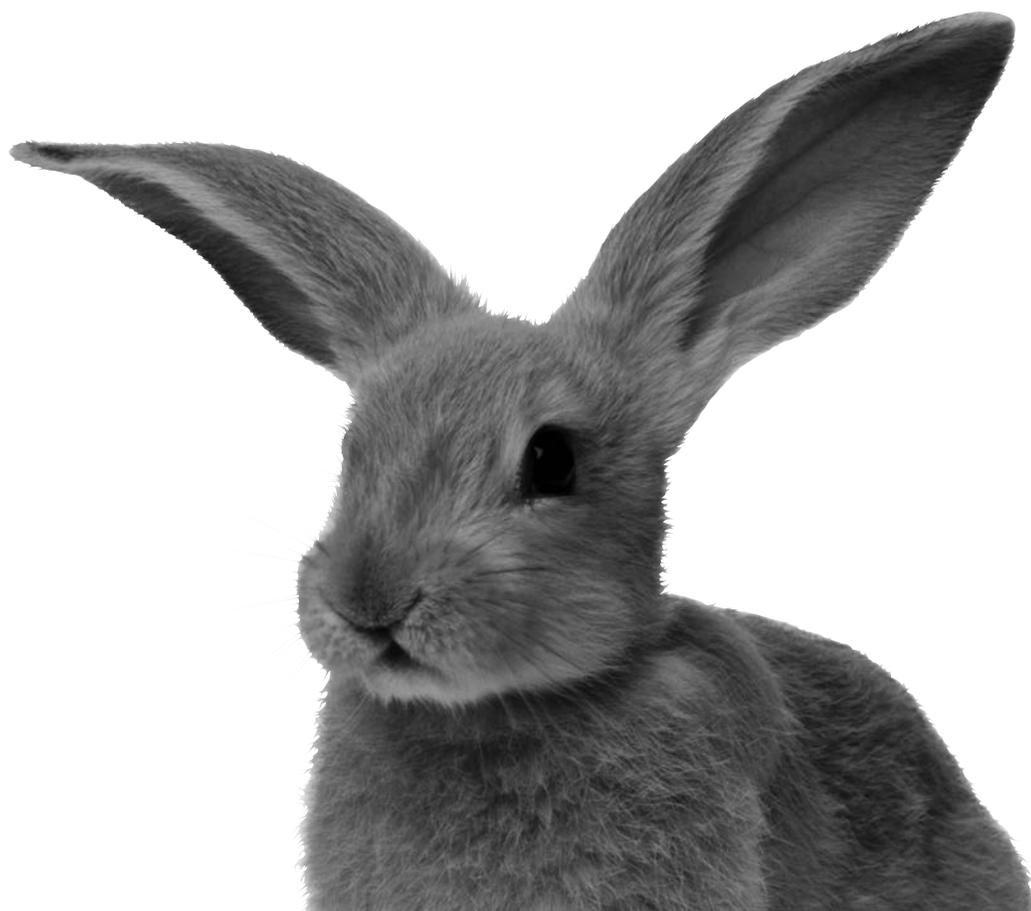
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We also suggest that you take advantage of our pet advice section on our website **OREGONHUMANE.ORG**. Workshops and individual, private training sessions are also available. Look on our web site under “Pet Training” for more information.

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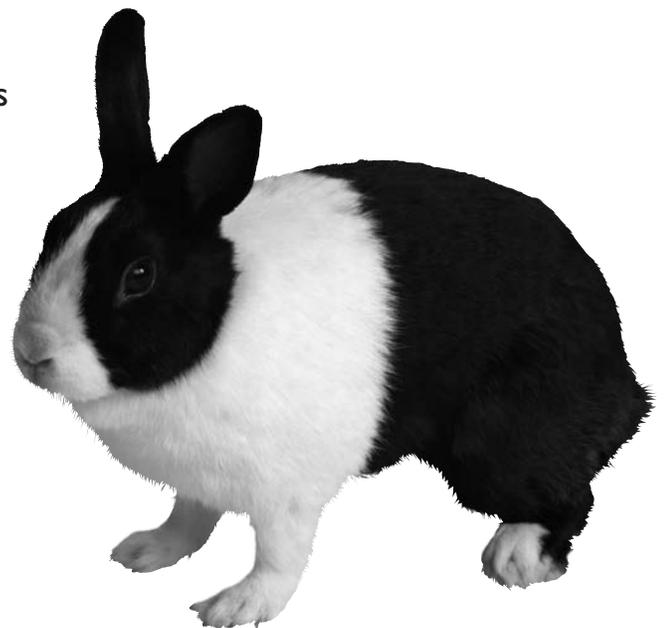
# CHAPTER 1

## PREPARING FOR YOUR NEW RABBIT

Having a rabbit can be a wonderful experience. Choosing to adopt a rabbit should be a carefully considered family decision and should not be based on an impulse. Educate yourself before bringing a rabbit home.

### **There are many things to consider carefully before adopting a rabbit.**

- A rabbit's average life span is between 8 and 12 years.
- Mature rabbits are ground-loving animals, a majority of whom are not content being carried around or being held for long periods of time. When trying to hold your rabbit, you may get nipped or scratched in the rabbit's effort to get away.
- Rabbits are very sensitive to sound. Households with active children and their friends can be quite noisy. This can be a situation that leads to health and temperament issues. Ask yourself if you have a safe, secure, and quiet place for the new bunny.
- Rabbits are not low-maintenance pets. Attention to their needs on a daily basis is vital to their well being. They need daily cage or pen cleaning, a consistent diet, and daily interaction with their caretakers.
- Consider the other pets in your household. Do you have a prey-driven dog or cat who loves to chase everything that moves? Is there a way to keep them apart while still providing for your rabbit's individual social and environmental needs?



## CHAPTER 2

### RABBIT PROOFING YOUR HOME

Before your new rabbit is let out of his cage, you should spend some important time on your hands and knees assessing the environment from the rabbit's vantage point; then make necessary changes to protect your rabbit and your furnishings.

- Most rabbits love to chew, so you must protect all your exposed electrical, computer, and telephone cords. Hide the cords if you can, but it is best to cover the cords with heavy plastic tubing if possible. Other more sturdy options are to use hard plastic telephone wire covers, split loom tubing, PVC pipe, or computer cord covers. Check these covers frequently to make sure they are intact.
- Relocate house plants. Rabbits will eat any plant within their reach.
- Wooden furniture, wall moldings, and rugs can become victims of a chewing rabbit. If they are chewers or diggers (and many are), you can try using Bitter Apple, lime or a cheap perfume on the items being chewed. You can also get plastic corner covers to protect moldings and place linoleum, carpet squares, phone books, or sea-grass mats where they are digging. A safety recommendation would be using outlet plugs in outlets rabbits have access to and baby-safe cabinet latches for keeping rabbits out of kitchen cupboards.



# CHAPTER 3

## WHAT TO HAVE ON HAND

The following is a list of items to purchase before you bring your new rabbit home.

### Housing

A spacious cage or pen can be used for the rabbit's living quarters. The cage should be large enough for your rabbit stretch out, stand up straight, and move around comfortably at its adult body size. The cage should also have room enough to contain food and water bowls and a litter box while still having room for your rabbit to sprawl out or romp around. The bigger the cage, the happier your rabbit will be. A cage with a front door or a pen that can be opened allows the rabbit to hop in and out on its own. If the cage has a wire floor, cover part of it with cardboard, wood or sea grass mats to protect your rabbit's feet from injury. The floor covering should be at least twice the size of the rabbit. A baby gate can be used to confine your rabbit in one room.

### Litter Box

Rabbits catch on quickly to using litter boxes. Be prepared to start with several litter boxes until the rabbit is housebroken. Place one in the rabbit's cage and one or two boxes elsewhere around the house that the rabbit will have access to. Since rabbits enjoy eating where they defecate, the best litter option would be lining the pan with newspaper with a handful of hay over the top. If you decide to use a different type of litter, it should be dust-free and safe for the rabbit if ingested. Never use wood shavings, clay litter or clumping litter. These types of litter may be harmful to your rabbit's health.

### Bowls

Provide heavy, non-tip ceramic bowls for pellets, fresh vegetables, and water. Lighter-weight bowls may become play toys.

### Grass Hay

Rabbits need to have hay available at all times. Grass hays, such as timothy hay or orchard grass hays, are the best. Alfalfa hay can be given to rabbits under 8 months old, those who are underweight, pregnant and senior rabbits, but consult your veterinarian on the proper amount to feed. Store hay in a cool, dry place and do not close the bag tightly. Toss out musty hay.

### Water Container

Keep fresh clean water available at all times. Use a water bottle with the double ball system. Check the bottle frequently to ensure it is working properly. A heavy ceramic bowl (so it can not be tossed around) can also be used. Caution: some rabbit's dewlaps may hang over the bowl and become wet. Constant wetness from the water bowl on a rabbit's dewlap can cause a skin infection.

### Toys

Rabbits love their toys and it's so much fun to watch them play. Ideas for safe toys include: wood bird toys, hard plastic baby toys (rattles, keys rings, etc.), wire cat balls, empty paper towel or toilet paper rolls, and cardboard boxes made into forts and tunnels, just to name a few.



### Pelleted Feed

Pellets should be high-quality timothy hay and contain at least 16 percent fiber. Avoid "gourmet feed" as rabbits will eat the tasty part and leave the nutrition behind. Feed an adult rabbit approximately ¼ cup of pellets per 5 pounds of body weight. Rabbits under eight months old should be free fed.

## Fruits and Vegetables

Introduce vegetables and fruits to your rabbit's diet slowly to avoid a sour stomach. Fruits are to be given in small amounts as treats only. Organic is best and remember to wash all fruits and vegetables before feeding to your rabbit. Here is a list of safe/recommended vegetables and fruits to get you started:

**Vegetables** Green Peppers, Artichoke, Asparagus, Beet Tops, Kale, Mustard Greens, Lettuce (romaine, red & green leaf), Basil, Mint, Parsley, Carrot (tops), Celery, Chard, Radish Tops, Cilantro, Sage, Clover, Collard Greens, Spinach, Cucumber, Dandelion (leaves, stem & flower), Watercress, and Zucchini. It is important not to feed iceberg lettuce to your rabbit as it can cause diarrhea and dehydration.

**Fruits** Apples (no seeds), Pears, Papayas, Honeydew Melon, Cantaloupe, Bananas, Blackberry (leaves, stems & fruit), Blueberry, Peach, Raspberry (leaves, stems & fruit), Strawberry, Tomato, Watermelon, and Grapes.



## Supplements

These are not necessary if you feed your rabbit a well-balanced diet. Many supplements currently on the market today can be toxic to rabbits. Consult your veterinarian prior to feeding your rabbit any supplements.

## Cleaning Supplies

White vinegar or Nature's Miracle is useful for cleaning any litter box accidents on the carpet and is non-toxic to your rabbit. Diluted bleach works well for disinfecting the cage, just make sure to rinse well.

## Nail Trimmer

A cat nail trimmer works well in small breeds. For larger breeds, try a dog nail trimmer. Consult your veterinarian for instructions as needed.

## Grooming Supplies

A soft brush slicker and metal comb are useful for grooming most rabbits. Be careful when grooming, as rabbits have very delicate skin that is easily damaged. Patience is needed when removing mats and tangles on longhaired breeds. Always pinch below the mat as you detangle a mat so you don't put pressure on the rabbit's sensitive skin. NEVER use scissors to remove a mat from your rabbit.



# CHAPTER 4

## CHILDREN AND RABBITS

If there are children in your household, it is important to teach them how to handle and act with your new rabbit to avoid stressing the rabbit and avoid causing potential injury to both. Children learn responsibility by good examples, so please guide your children and regularly monitor the care being provided for your pets.

Here are some guidelines to help your children and your new rabbit live happily together:

Instruct children to be calm, quiet, and slow moving when being introduced to the rabbit.

Handle the rabbit gently and tell children not to squeeze or hold too tightly. Most children under the age of 5 cannot hold a rabbit properly without squeezing too tight. Rabbits generally do not like being held and may scratch or nip at a child to get away. Children should be sitting on the floor with the rabbit in their lap in case the rabbit makes a quick escape. Children should leave the rabbit alone when he is sleeping, eating, or using the litter box.



# CHAPTER 5

## THE RIDE HOME

Most rabbits do not like traveling. Here are some tips that will help your rabbit have a safe and calm time during the ride home.

Please keep your new rabbit in the carrier provided—it is the **ONLY** safe way to transport your pet. Have an adult carry the rabbit in its carrier to your vehicle to eliminate “swinging” of the carrier. Use a seat belt or tether to secure the carrier in your car.

Do not allow children to tease or excite the rabbit. Have them keep their hands and fingers to themselves! Never allow them to open the carrier to pet the rabbit.

Do not leave the rabbit in the car unattended, even for a short stop to shop. Rabbits can over-heat very quickly. Buy your supplies at our retail store and then you can take rabbit straight home.

Please keep the rabbit in its carrier until you are safely inside your home with the doors shut. Once home, the rabbit will need time to settle.



## HOUSING NEEDS

Your rabbit will need a space to call home even if he is allowed to roam freely around the house. This will give him a sense of security and allow him to be safely confined if there are children or other pets in his running area.

### Why keep a rabbit inside?

Housing your rabbits inside has many advantages and we only recommend indoor housing for them. Your pet will become part of your family just like a cat or dog. A rabbit needs companionship, and he will receive it if he lives near you. His wonderful personality and unique rabbit behaviors will delight you. Your rabbit will be safe from predators and the elements. Caution: avoid using a busy garage to house your rabbit if it is used for a variety of other purposes. Remember, rabbits need a quiet, stress-free environment.

You will get so familiar with your rabbit that any changes in his behavior (i.e., activity level, eating, or bathroom habits) will be noticed when they first appear. These changes could indicate serious or even life-threatening conditions and may warrant your immediate attention.



## Wire Cage

Buy the largest cage you can afford for your new rabbit. The general rule of thumb is that the length of the cage should be 4-5 times the size of the full grown rabbit when he is stretched out and the height should allow enough room for him to sit up comfortably. A sitting board or cardboard square should be placed inside the cage to protect the rabbit's feet.

Ideally, the cage should have both a side and a top opening. If there is only one opening, it is best to have it on the side with a swinging door hinged from the side. Be sure the opening is large enough to accommodate a litter box.

The ideal cage would have a solid bottom. If you choose a cage with a wire bottom, there should be a metal tray below the wire floor. Line this with newspaper or a paper based litter. Do not use pine or cedar shavings in the tray or in the litter box, as toxic fumes will be emitted and, over time, these can damage the rabbit's liver and lungs.

## Wire Exercise Pens

Collapsible wire exercise pens (can be purchased in our Best Friends Corner store) can be placed on hardwood or linoleum floors to allow your rabbit to roam. Inside this area you can place a wooden or cardboard box for the rabbit to hide in and chew on, litter box, food and water dishes, and toys. Rabbits love boxes to hide in while playing. These boxes need to have at least two openings. Rabbits prefer quick escapes; having just one opening could cause your rabbit to panic and thrash around in the box. If your rabbit is a jumper, pay special attention to the height of the pen.



# CHAPTER 6

## LITTER BOX TRAINING

Yes, your rabbit can be litter-box trained! Rabbits are clean and prefer to have one or more special toilet areas. The ease of training can vary between rabbits. Many rabbits take to a litter box very easily; some require a bit more persistence and patience on your part. Training can be influenced by several factors, including the presence of other (non-bonded) rabbits, the size of your rabbit's initial area, age of your rabbit (adult rabbits catch on quicker), and especially whether your rabbit is spayed or neutered.

### How to Begin

To start, confinement and supervision is the key. If a rabbit is allowed to urinate and defecate wherever it likes from the beginning, it will be much harder to train. At first, keep your rabbit primarily in his or her cage, with a litter pan. Place a litter box in the cage, and note where your rabbit eliminates. He may start using the box, or may pick another corner of the cage to use as a toilet. If this is the case, move the litter box to the area your rabbit seems to prefer. Flexibility on litter box placement may be necessary both in and out of the cage.

Keep your rabbit's hay and food bowl in the litter box. Much like cows and horses, rabbits usually defecate while eating.

Once your rabbit is using the litter pan in the cage, allow the rabbit out of the cage in a limited area. Provide a litter box within this area, and perhaps make it enticing by placing a treat or favorite toy in the box. If you notice your rabbit tends to head to one area to do its business, consider putting the box there.

Accidents will happen, and punishment has no place in training a rabbit. Your rabbit will absolutely not be able to make a connection with physical punishment and eliminating outside the litter box. If you catch your rabbit in the act, calmly and gently take him or her to the litter box immediately. But if you don't physically catch your rabbit urinating or defecating, it is too late for your rabbit to make the connection. Just clean up and watch your rabbit a little more closely next time (clean the spot with diluted vinegar or a commercial pet stain/odor remover). The key is to get your rabbit to the box before he goes, so a trip to the litter box every 10 minutes during playtime can be helpful.

Over time, your rabbit will probably develop a preference for using the box, and then the amount of freedom you give your rabbit can be increased. You may need to provide more boxes as you allow your rabbit access to more space (rabbits may not go far in search of a box, so have them handy). Again, if your rabbit repeatedly chooses one place in his room to eliminate, consider putting or moving a litter box there. Try to work with what your rabbit naturally wants to do, but if the location they choose is inconvenient, you can try putting a litter box there for a while and then gradually move it to a better spot. Sometimes, placing a bowl of food where you don't want them to potty works too.

The process sounds daunting, but usually goes pretty smoothly as long as the owner works with the rabbit's natural tendencies and provides undivided attention to the rabbit during its free time in the beginning. Establishing a routine with your rabbit will also help. Sometimes a previously trained rabbit will get a little careless, and this usually means backtracking and restricting freedom until your rabbit is trained again.

### Marking

Older rabbits are usually easier to train than young bunnies, as they do not need to eliminate as frequently and their natural desire for cleanliness is more developed. However, once rabbits hit puberty the desire to mark territory becomes very strong, even previously well-trained rabbits may start urine marking and spraying as well as defecating to mark territory. Marking behavior will often result from a

variety of stresses along with the natural instinct to stake out a territory. Urine marking does not always take the form of spraying, and both males and females mark, although it is far more common with intact (not neutered) males.

Have your rabbit spayed or neutered by 4-6 months of age. This has many health benefits for your rabbit, and will also make litter training easier and reduce urine spraying and other marking behaviors. Getting the surgery done at a young age works best - once marking becomes an established behavior, it may be very difficult to litter train the rabbit.



Make sure the rabbit feels secure in its home. Try to avoid reaching into the cage and pulling a rabbit out, as this may make the rabbit feel threatened and more likely to mark. Be sure to do cage maintenance (cleaning the cage, etc.) while the rabbit is out of the cage.

Sometimes territorial marking is a temporary situation, and may occur in response to some sort of stress, change in routine, change in the household, or addition of another pet (particularly another rabbit). Often, once the rabbit no longer feels stressed or is confident his territory is secure; he will stop marking.

With all that said, rabbits are prone to urinary tract health problems, so if there is a sudden persistent change in urination habits or in the color and amount of urine, a trip to your veterinarian is in order. This

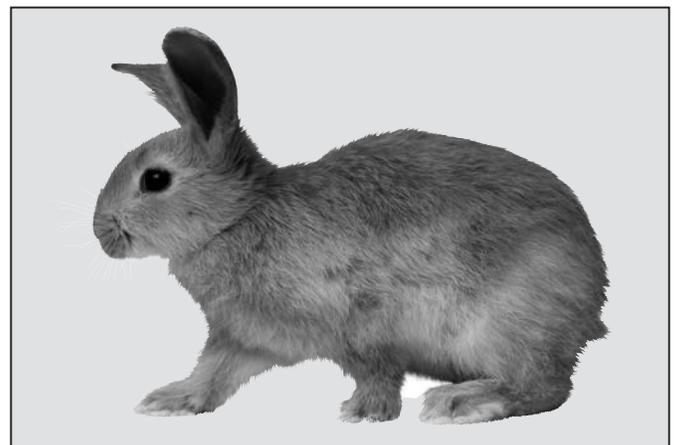
is especially true if your rabbit starts urinating small amounts frequently (most rabbits urinate infrequently and in large volumes).

### Night Droppings (Cecotrophs)

These are small soft fecal pellets resembling a cluster of grapes. Rabbits often ingest the cecotrophs directly from the anus. These are usually produced 4-5 hours after a meal. The cecotrophs are softer than regular pellets with a stronger odor and should not be confused with actual diarrhea. Cecotrophs contain nutrients essential to your rabbit's health.

### Choosing a Litter Box

Choose litter boxes that are a good size for your rabbit. Any box that is waterproof and holds hay can be used as a litter box. If your rabbit has a habit of throwing their box, punch holes in the rim of the box and secure it to their cage with twist ties, wire or leash clips. If your rabbit throws litter you may want to buy a litter box with a grid or make your own grid. Plastic storage bins with their high walls make great litter boxes. Keep in mind that the grid must not have sharp edges and must allow the fecal pellets to fall through to the bottom of the box.



Empty and clean the litter boxes daily. If your rabbit refuses to use their box, they might be telling you it's time for a change. Clean your boxes with white vinegar and hot water to disinfect and remove urine deposits. For accidents outside the litter box, clean up with vinegar, club soda or Nature's Miracle.

# CHAPTER 7

## PLAYTIME

Rabbits are by nature curious, fun-loving creatures and need mental stimulation as well as physical exercise. A rabbit with no outlet for these natural tendencies can become bored, lonely, overweight, destructive, or depressed. Toys should be provided in your rabbit's cage and in their exercise area.

Try an empty toilet paper or paper towel roll stuffed with hay. A cardboard box with an entrance and exit cut into it is great fun. Some small inexpensive child or animal toys that appeal to a playful rabbit include Batta Balls (a ball with a bell inside), hard plastic baby teething keys/rings, baby rattles, and hanging bird or baby toys. Balloons must be avoided along with squishy balls (Nerf) and toys that can get caught in your rabbit's mouth.

Give your rabbit toys that he can dig his teeth in or chew and he will be less likely to amuse himself by digging or chewing in places you'd rather he didn't. Apple tree branches make ideal chew toys. They help wear the rabbit's teeth and stimulate natural rabbit behavior.

## HEALTH

With proper care a rabbit can live 8-12 years. This includes proper diet, spaying or neutering, and an annual examination by a rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian. Many medical conditions in rabbits are preventable if owners know some of the basics. Here is some information to help you.

### Spaying/Neutering

Besides controlling population, spaying and neutering have other important benefits. Many inappropriate behaviors that result in an owner giving up a rabbit can be prevented by having your pet spayed or neutered. The leading cause of death for female rabbits is uterine cancer, and spaying your female rabbit greatly reduces this risk. It has been shown that unsplayed females above the age of two years have an 80 percent chance of this type of cancer. Spaying and neutering also may decrease unwanted aggressive behavior and spraying. This also makes it possible to keep a male and female together.

## Parasites

If any of these little problematic parasites are spotted, take your rabbit into the vet for a check up and professional advice on ridding your rabbit of the problem. Always ask your veterinarian before doing any type of treatments to make sure they are rabbit safe.

- Ear mite infestations cause accumulation of a light brown crusty material that nearly fills the external ear canal. The underlying tissues are usually very raw and irritated. In especially severe cases, these sores may spread to adjacent areas of the head.
- Fur mites (*Cheyletiella*) usually occur on the back between the shoulder blades and look like flaky dandruff. Some rabbits may harbor them for many years without signs. Severe cases may cause hair loss.
- Lice cause itching and irritation and leave little white eggs. Look for these little eggs in the ears or clinging to your pet's fur.
- Fleas are not common on pet rabbits. A rabbit may get fleas from other household pets.
- Coccidia are an internal parasite that affects the liver or intestine. Usually only young and stressed rabbits are affected. Signs may include diarrhea, lethargy, weight loss, or poor weight gain.
- Bot Fly Larva lay their eggs under the rabbit's skin. Surgical removal of the larva is usually necessary. Infestation may cause lameness, anorexia and shock.
- Pin Worms inhabit the lower half of the digestive tract. They can cause self-trauma, rectal prolapsed and inflammation and infection of the area around the rabbits rectum.

## Teeth

Domestic rabbits belong to a small group of animals that have continuously growing or open-rooted teeth. This means that all teeth in the mouth, including the incisors in the front of the mouth and the premolars and molars (called cheek teeth), will continue to grow throughout the rabbit's lifetime. The reason for this is that rabbits in the wild eat a large amount of coarse, fibrous material such as dried plants and poor-quality greens. The teeth are constantly worn against each other and against the coarse diet; they would soon wear out if not constantly replaced. If a rabbit's teeth and diet are normal, then the teeth will wear down at a constant rate that is equal to the growth rate of the tooth. If, however, a rabbit's teeth do not meet correctly or the rabbit does not enough roughage, then dental problems can occur.

Malocclusion is the term for teeth that don't meet correctly. Because a rabbit's teeth are constantly growing, malocclusion can cause small points to grow on the teeth from uneven wear. These points can irritate the tongue or cheek and cause eating to be a painful experience. Overgrown incisors can actually grow into the opposing jaw or lip. Malocclusion of the incisors is easy to see if you take the time to look carefully at your rabbit's front teeth. If you see that one incisor (left or right) is longer than the other, you should contact your veterinarian. It is normal for the upper incisors to be about twice as long as the lower incisors. Without specialized equipment it is impossible to view the cheek teeth of a rabbit, so your veterinarian will have to do that for you. It should be part of your rabbit's physical exam.

## Anorexia

Any time a rabbit stops eating, it is a medical emergency. Contact your rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian immediately.

## Diarrhea

True diarrhea in a rabbit is not very common. Sudden diet change, low roughage diet, excessive sugar, or antibiotics not suited to rabbits (Amoxicillin) can all

induce diarrhea. If your rabbit has runny stool or stool caked to its fur, consult your veterinarian. If diarrhea is left on your rabbit's fur, fly strikes (maggots) may appear. Prolonged diarrhea can be fatal in rabbits.

## Urine

The color of rabbit's urine varies from yellow to dark brown and from clear to cloudy. Some rabbits get what is known as urine sludge. This can be caused by too much calcium in the diet, which can cause straining and decreased urine output. If your rabbit strains or has thick urine, consult your veterinarian.

## Wounds

With any wound or scratch, consult your veterinarian before treating. Wounds left untreated may quickly turn into an abscess requiring surgery and antibiotic therapy.

## Heat

Overheating can be fatal to a rabbit. Rabbits do not do well in high temperature settings. During the summer we must think of how our pets will survive the heat. Many rabbits, including house rabbits, die each summer of heat-related stress. A rabbit's optimal air temperature is between 50°F and 70°F.

There are many ways to keep your rabbit cool. First and most important, always make sure your rabbit has plenty of fresh cool water available. If air conditioning is not an option, try a fan strategically placed so the rabbit cannot chew the cord. Another idea is to freeze a milk jug full of water and place it in a large bowl in the rabbit's room or cage. Use the bowl around the milk jug to keep the puddles of condensation off the rabbit. Most rabbits will soon lie down with their bodies pressed against the cold bowl. The frozen milk jugs usually last about 8-10 hours depending on the air temperature.

If preventative measures do not work and your rabbit appears to be overheated, this can be an emergency. Watch your rabbit for panting or lethargy and seek medical advice when necessary.

## Hairballs

For rabbit owners, the word hairball can strike fear in their hearts. Hairballs have long been considered one of the most serious ailments in rabbits, with the potential to cause death. But what exactly is a hairball and why does it seem primarily to affect pet rabbits and not their wild cousins?

A hairball, technically called a trichobezoar, is an accumulation of hair within the digestive tract. It is thought that this hair is ingested when the rabbit grooms. The accumulated hair bunches up into a ball that cannot pass through the intestinal tract, usually leading to an obstruction. This is also referred to as wool block, gastric stasis or hair block. The stomach is the most common part of the intestinal tract affected. Cats are also commonly affected with hairballs, but the difference between cats and rabbits is that cats typically and harmlessly vomit their hairballs. Rabbits do not have the physical ability to vomit.

Rabbits with poor appetite, smaller fecal pellets, weakness and weight loss need to be seen by your veterinarian. Preventing hairballs is crucial to maintaining the health of your rabbit. Regular brushing helps as well as a good diet.

## Pasteurella

Pasteurella can be acquired from anywhere, especially other rabbits, and often from humans who may carry it on their skin or clothing. The bacteria enter the body via the nose or open wounds and start growing. Over half of all rabbits carry Pasteurella bacteria in their bodies, but most are not sick. A healthy immune system either eliminates the bacteria from the system, or keeps their numbers and location tightly controlled where they are harmless. However, some rabbits are not able to destroy the Pasteurella that has colonized their bodies so they develop pasteurellosis, a clinical disease.

Commonly, rabbits with pasteurellosis show upper respiratory disease, also known as “snuffles.” Rabbits clean and wipe their runny noses, unlike children, unless they are very ill. The slight crusting around the

nostrils may go unnoticed, but the fur on the insides of the forepaws should be checked because this is where the discharge accumulates. Consult a rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian for your rabbit’s health care. If left untreated, Pasteurella can lead to pneumonia.

Important signs of serious health problems with your rabbit may include: lethargy, sitting hunched up, hiding in unusual places, anorexia, drooling, diarrhea, no stool, straining to urinate, sneezing, eye discharge, loud teeth grinding, the appearance of blood, pus, or maggots. Many of these conditions can be life threatening. If your rabbit shows any of these signs please consult your veterinarian immediately.



# CHAPTER 8

## INTRODUCING YOUR RABBIT TO OTHER PETS

Rabbits, like people, enjoy the company of others. Companionship helps to fill the hours while owners are away at work or out of the home. A bored rabbit may get into more mischief than a rabbit focusing attention on a companion.

### Rabbit to Rabbit

The first thing you will need to do is find a companion for your rabbit. Neutered rabbits are introduced more easily, since they are less territorial. Always introduce the two rabbits on neutral territory, away from anywhere where either rabbit has spent any time. The easiest introductions are between a neutered male and a spayed female, or between two spayed females. Introducing two unspayed females over about 4 months has a lot more potential for serious fighting, so you will find the whole process far more possible if you have your existing rabbit spayed and introduce a younger, spayed female.

When the time comes to introduce your rabbits, locate the two rabbits in adjacent cages where they can see and smell each other. Once they are familiar with each other's presence without obvious stress, you can introduce them on neutral territory for short periods of time. If a fight occurs, separate them immediately and try again after a few hours. If they appear uninterested in each other or groom themselves, this is a good sign. Even if fighting does not happen, separate the rabbits after 15 minutes and re-introduce them every hour or so until the rabbits seem entirely relaxed together. You will need to have two litter pans as rabbits can take ownership and fight over just having one litterbox available. A good sign is if they will eat from the same bowl together without any sign of aggravation. You will be able to leave the rabbits unsupervised for short periods of time if the rabbits engage in grooming each other.

Introducing two rabbits is not easy and may take from a few days to a few months before you can leave them completely alone at all times. If no fighting occurs when they first meet, your chances of success are high. However, if persistent fighting occurs in the first day or two, the chances are poor.

### Rabbit to Cat

Rabbits and cats can become friends in your home. The funny thing is that many cats are often afraid of a rabbit. They don't know what to make of this odd-looking creature, and often they will run and hide. When your cat finally comes back out, start with your cat and rabbit separated through a cage or a barrier.

Some introductions can go badly, even with otherwise amiable cats. Cats known for bringing home dead mice or chasing after birds are not good candidates for sharing their home with a rabbit. Even loving cats can suddenly show signs of aggression (ears flat back, hair standing up) and may even attack an unsuspecting rabbit. Multiple-cat households need constant observation as multiple cats can quickly gang up on an unwary rabbit.

Cats can do much damage with their teeth and claws, so if your rabbit becomes injured, please get him to a rabbit-knowledgeable veterinarian. Don't risk introductions with cats that are mighty hunters.

### Rabbits to Dog

Rabbit-to-dog introductions need more supervision than with other house pets. It's important to know your dog and determine if the pair will be compatible. If your household has a puppy, young dog, terrier or retriever, don't leave him alone with your rabbit. It would be best to keep them in separate rooms. Barking dogs can cause panic and the "My, you look tasty" look can be quite terrifying to a rabbit.

If your dog chases birds or squirrels, don't tempt fate. It would be safest for the rabbit to have a different home. On the other hand, if you have a mature dog, especially one that has exposure and positive experiences with small critters, they often will accept and do very well with your rabbit.

Before introducing your rabbit, your dog must be under voice command and have had obedience training. If you have to repeat commands over and over, or he just does not listen, don't even try it. It is essential that your dog be on a leash, in your control, and quiet during the introduction. The rabbit can be in his normal habitat. Do this several times, just being in the same area with the bunny. Do not rush; do not force a nose-to-nose. You will know by your dog's reaction. Soon, he may be able to go up to your rabbit when your rabbit is curious towards your dog; not when the rabbit is hiding in a box, tucked in his cage, or under the bed.

Soon your rabbit and your dog may be nose-to-nose (with your dog still on his leash). You will know if your dog is mature and calm enough to unleash him. Is your rabbit content and curious? Always be with them. No matter how wonderful they get along, never leave them alone.



## Rabbit to Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs and rabbits are easy to care for together because they have similar housing, dietary and health needs. Your rabbit's box of timothy hay provides nutrition, a bathroom, and an ideal burrowing zone for a guinea pig. The basic diet of hay, pellets, fresh vegetables and fresh fruit treats works for both animals, though guinea pigs need supplemental vitamin C. This is available from special formula pellets and foods like red or yellow peppers and oranges. Rabbits can share these extras, but be careful if your rabbit is obese. Its fun to watch them eat together: sometimes shy guinea pigs will sneak up and swipe food from rabbits many times their size.

Guinea pigs are usually easier to introduce to a rabbit than another rabbit because there's no intraspecies competition for dominance. While guinea pigs generally make good rabbit friends, it's important to make sure both animals are healthy because they can carry diseases which may be harmful to the other species. It's also never a "sure thing" when introducing animals; not all will get along, so always observe them closely until they are settled, or adopt a bonded pair.



# CHAPTER 9

## BEHAVIOR

Rabbits “present” themselves to one another for acknowledgement and for grooming. If one of your rabbits approaches a second and puts his head down, he is not the subservient one but the dominant one, and is demanding to be groomed. And because they respect one another and the established hierarchy, the second rabbit generally will commence to licking the dominant’s forehead and ears.

The established hierarchy, however, is not set in stone, and the dominant rabbit will often become the groomer. Sometimes you’ll find rabbits engaged in a struggle of “love me; no you love me,” and they struggle to thrust their foreheads under one another’s chins. Sometimes the dominant rabbit will generously agree to be the groomer. Sometimes the dominant one refuses and instead insists upon a full-body grooming by stretching out in front of the other rabbit to bask in worshipful adoration.

Rabbits will not even pass each other without acknowledging one another’s presence by sniffing and bumping noses. Rabbit owners may unknowingly violate this requirement if they walk past rabbits without acknowledging them. You don’t have to get down on all fours to bump noses, but you should take the time to stop and give them a pet. After all, to a rabbit, it’s just simple respect.

### Handling Your Rabbit

Being picked up is not a natural experience for a rabbit and their first reaction is fear; however, over time and with patience they will become accustomed to being handled.

Rabbits have very delicate bodies and you must take care when you hold them. When you go to pick up a rabbit, approach them from the front or side so they can see you coming and that way they are less likely to become frightened. Gently talk to and stroke your rabbit to calm them; place one hand under their chest and use the other to support their hindquarters and help prevent them from kicking out backwards. You

should move your rabbit only a short way like this, such as from their hutch to a carry case.

To carry a small rabbit, keep a firm grip, but DO NOT squeeze, and hold the rabbit so that it is facing you and all four feet are touching your chest. One hand should still be supporting the hindquarters and the other over the shoulders. Be cautious of the rabbit attempting to run up your chest rapidly to escape. If this occurs, quickly cup your hand over the rabbit’s face, as this has a calming and neutralizing effect.

For larger rabbits, hold them sideways against your body with their hind feet resting at your left hip and their head facing your right shoulder. Hold your left arm across your rabbit’s body, support its chest with your fingers and hold your thumb over your rabbit’s shoulders. With your right hand, support the rabbit’s hindquarters and hold its feet firmly against you so that the rabbit can’t kick out.

If you are a new rabbit owner, or your rabbit doesn’t like being lifted and struggles initially, it is a good idea to kneel on the floor when you lift them from their hutch. It goes without saying that you want to avoid your rabbit falling at all costs, but if you kneel and your rabbit does squirm free, they will have a shorter distance to fall.

When placing your rabbit back in its cage, make sure you carefully support it with both hands at all times. They may be excited about returning to their cage so make sure you don’t release your grip until the rabbit is safely on the floor of the hutch.

You should never pick up a rabbit by the ears, legs or scruff as this can cause serious damage and pain to your rabbit. Rabbits may respond by trying to bite or attack the person causing the pain.

## Aggressive Behavior

You may not know about the life your rabbit lived before finding his way to your home. If the rabbit was not treated kindly before you came along, you might find your rabbit acting out aggressively. The rabbit might growl, lunge at your feet as you walk past, or even bite. Sometimes the rabbit may do all these things to protect himself from increasing intrusion into his territory. If you find you're greeted by growls when you put your hand in the rabbit's cage, compare it to your neighbor walking into your home unannounced. You'd probably growl, too.

Treat aggression the same way you would treat "acting out" in a human child. Be calm, patient, and kind. As with any pet, do not hit your rabbit. A stern "no" is generally the best way to get your point across.

If you have a rabbit prone to nipping your hand, try stroking his face from the nose to the ears while gently pushing his head down at the same time. You'll prevent another nip and give the rabbit the idea who is boss.

Uninvited petting or playing that interrupts lounging time may elicit a response demonstrating how much the owner has offended the rabbit. If you somehow engage in an offensive behavior, the rabbit will let you know by hopping away from you turning sideways. He might hop away in an exaggerated manner, flicking his feet at you. The exaggerated foot flick is a general signal used when your rabbit wants nothing to do with you.

Watch for warning signs to back off. The rabbit may put his ears back, growl, lunge at you, and maybe even nip at your hand or stomp the floor with his hind feet. You should consider these actions as a warning.

While it's easy to offend a rabbit, it's also easy to be forgiven. Waiting a little while and then offering some petting again will likely put yourself back in good graces. You can always try the food approach, because the way to a rabbit's heart is definitely through the tummy.

Occasionally, a rabbit may take a strong dislike to a particular person. This may be due to a previous event such as rough handling or attempts to medicate. You may want to have someone else (who knows how to handle a rabbit) be the "bad guy" when your rabbit needs to be restrained and given medication. This preserves your trusting relationship.

## The Active Rabbit

Rabbits are hardworking and industrious. If you do not provide the rabbit with an activity, you might find he will occupy himself with jobs you don't want completed: nibbling plaster walls, chewing telephone cords, or digging in the carpet. Remember that a bored rabbit can be a destructive rabbit.

You can avoid this destructive behavior by substituting activities, toys, and projects. You might find a second rabbit helps curb this behavior. A bonded pair will occupy each other and deter naughty activities.

Rabbits are very curious and will spend considerable time checking out their surroundings. Just to keep things interesting, some owners periodically rearrange the rabbit's living space or introduce new objects for fun.

## Playtime

Days and nights are spent hanging out or sleeping and early mornings and evenings are for celebrating and cavorting. Rabbits will be the hungriest during these same hours, and may alternate between eating and playing. Playful rabbits will run, leap in the air, and toss their toys. If given free reign of the house, they may run up and down the stairs, jump onto the sofa, down again, race down the hall, and come back again. They might greet you by tossing their heads up and to the side. That's general rabbit "talk" and is an invitation to play. Accept the invitation, get out the toys and let the games begin.

# CHAPTER 10

## UNDERSTANDING BODY LANGUAGE

Rabbits use their ears to “talk.” Here is a basic course in reading your rabbit:

**Ears Forward** “What’s that you say?” The rabbit is very interested in what you are doing.

**Ears Back** The rabbit is saying “I don’t like that” or “wake me when it’s time for supper.” Here it’s important to know whether your rabbit is relaxed and resting or feeling threatened. If your rabbit puts his ears back, his tail up, and growls, you’ll know it’s the latter.

**One Ear Back, One Ear Forward** Your rabbit is telling you that they hear what you are saying, but are not paying much attention.

**Nose Nudge** “Pet me, pet me now” or “Move, you’re in my way.”

**Tooth Clicking** “I’m so happy I’m purring!”

**Nipping** Can be either a warning or a way to groom since rabbits lick and nibble to groom each other.

**Licking** “I love you” or “Wow, you need a bath.”

**Circling** If your feet are being circled as you walk across the room, your rabbit could be saying, “Let’s play!” If your rabbit has not been neutered, you’re being targeted for love.

**Dancing** Also called “doing binkies”—A run followed by a jump and a 180 degree mid-air turn is an example of joyous abandon and says, “Yippee!”

**Foot Thumping** It could be a warning to you “leave me alone” or a warning for you, “Something is amiss here and you need to alert the others”. Something has startled your rabbit and he is informing the rest of the warren and trying to ward off predators with a big sound.



# CHAPTER 11

## CONCLUSION

Animals in our lives provide a blessing and an opportunity to share the world with another species. It is a responsibility to take seriously. “Working through” behavior and medical issues will deepen your relationship with your animals and provide a valuable lesson to children and adults, teaching that the bond is indeed one that will endure tough times and last for the lifetime of your pet. “Getting rid” of an animal because it does not meet expectations, has not been taught good manners, or needs expensive medical care is a poor example of animal ownership.

### When the match isn't right...

Sometimes a relationship is not successful. If keeping your companion rabbit becomes impossible, you will need to notify the Oregon Humane Society of plans for placement or make an appointment at (503) 285-7722, ext. 211 to return the animal to the shelter.

If you wish to place the animal yourself, please select the home with care. Once transfer of ownership has taken place, please notify OHS with the new owner's information so that the microchip and owner information can be updated in our database.

In some cases, an exchange will be offered to you for another animal. Depending on the reason for surrender, OHS may place restrictions on the types of animals you select to prevent another poor match. For instance, if the rabbit you selected did not interact well with kids, it will be important that the next animal has a good history with children.

All of us at the Oregon Humane Society want to help you make the right pet choice and to keep the loving bond for the lifetime of the pet. Please give us a call at 503-285-7722 with any questions you may have; we are glad to assist!



## SERVICES DIRECTORY

OHS is dedicated to making our community a better place. Call (503) 285-7722 for more information or visit us online at [www.oregonhumane.org](http://www.oregonhumane.org).

### ANIMAL ADOPTIONS

Cats, dogs, birds, rodents and rabbits are available for adoption. (503) 285-7722 • [oregonhumane.org/adopt](http://oregonhumane.org/adopt)

### ANIMAL ASSISTED INTERACTIONS (AAI) TRAINING

The AAI prep school prepares people and pets for the national evaluation exam.

(503) 802-6713 • [oregonhumane.org/pet\\_training](http://oregonhumane.org/pet_training)

### ANIMAL CRUELTY INVESTIGATIONS

OHS officers investigate animal neglect and abuse.

(503) 285-7722 x214 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### ANIMAL RESCUE

OHS responds to situations where an animal is trapped and needs human help (in case of emergency, call your local police). (503) 802-6707 • [oregonhumane.org/rescue](http://oregonhumane.org/rescue)

### ANIMAL SHELTER ASSISTANCE

Food, supplies and training are offered to animal agencies throughout Oregon.

(503) 416-2993 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### BEHAVIOR HELP LINE & WEB PAGES

If you have questions about problem pet behavior, call our free help-line at (503) 416-2983 or visit us on the web at [oregonhumane.org/pet\\_training](http://oregonhumane.org/pet_training)

### EMERGENCY ANIMAL BOARDING

OHS works through various agencies to provide emergency animal care for victims of disasters and domestic violence

(503) 285-7722 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### FIND A HOME FOR YOUR PET

If you are unable to keep your pet, OHS may be able to place your pet in a new home. Call first to schedule an appointment.

(503) 285-7722, x211 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### HUMANE EDUCATION FOR YOUTHS

OHS offers classroom presentations, after-school clubs, summer camps and more.

(503) 416-2986 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### LOST AND FOUND PETS

OHS does not accept stray dogs; call your local animal control agency. We accept other stray animals under certain circumstances. Call ahead before bringing in a stray and visit our website for more resources.

(503) 285-7722, x211 • [oregonhumane.org/lost\\_pets](http://oregonhumane.org/lost_pets)

### PET MEMORIALS

OHS maintains an animal mausoleum, columbarium and cemetery and provides private cremation services. Euthanasia services are offered if no other options are available. (503) 285-7722 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)

### PET TRAINING

OHS offers classes and consultations to help with basic manners and resolve pet behavior issues.

(503) 285-7722 x225 • [oregonhumane.org/pet\\_training](http://oregonhumane.org/pet_training)

### SPAY & NEUTER FINANCIAL AID

OHS offers interest-free loans and discount coupons.

(503) 285-7722 • [oregonhumane.org/services](http://oregonhumane.org/services)



## WAYS TO HELP

To learn more about opportunities to help animals, call (503) 285-7722 or visit us online at [oregonhumane.org](http://oregonhumane.org).

### AUTOS FOR ANIMALS

Donate your vehicle to OHS and claim a charitable deduction. (503) 416-7079 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITIES

Lifetime income plus a tax deduction. Contact Gary Kish, (503) 416-2988 • [devdir@oregonhumane.org](mailto:devdir@oregonhumane.org)

### CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS

Sponsor an OHS event or organize a benefit. (503) 416-7084 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### ESTATE GIFTS

Include OHS in your will, trust or with a beneficiary designation. Contact Gary Kish, (503) 416-2988 • [devdir@oregonhumane.org](mailto:devdir@oregonhumane.org)

### FRIENDS FOREVER™

Ensure the welfare of pets who may outlive you. Contact Gary Kish, (503) 416-2988 • [devdir@oregonhumane.org](mailto:devdir@oregonhumane.org)

### GIFTS OF STOCK

To make a gift of securities. (503) 416-7083 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### IN-KIND DONATIONS

See our wish list on-line at: [oregonhumane.org/donate/needed\\_supplies.asp](http://oregonhumane.org/donate/needed_supplies.asp)

### MEMBERSHIP

A \$30 membership includes a 10% discount at OHS retail shelter stores, and more. (503) 416-5024 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### MONETARY DONATIONS

OHS relies entirely on private donations. (503) 416-2989 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### ONE COOL THING

Donate fine art, jewelry, popular electronics, or memorabilia. (503) 416-7079 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### PAWS

Monthly gifts through the Planned Account Withdrawal System (PAWS) support OHS throughout the year. (503) 416-5024 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### TLC

The Thomas Lamb Eliot Circle (TLC) honors donors contributing \$1,000 annually. (503) 416-7083 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### TRIBUTE GIFTS

Tribute gifts can be made in memory of, or in honor of, a pet or loved one. A card will be sent to your loved one. (503) 416-5027 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

### VOLUNTEER

OHS volunteer programs are available for teens, adults, groups and companies. (503) 285-7722, x204 • [oregonhumane.org/volunteer](http://oregonhumane.org/volunteer)

### WORKPLACE GIVING CAMPAIGNS

To learn more about workplace giving campaigns. (503)416-7079 • [oregonhumane.org/donate](http://oregonhumane.org/donate)

Remember to license your new pet with your local county animal control:

**MULTNOMAH COUNTY** 503-988-7387

**CLACKAMAS COUNTY** 503-655-8629

**WASHINGTON COUNTY** 503-846-7041

**CLARK COUNTY** 360-699-2096

# CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW RABBIT!

## PLAN FOR PET DURING DISASTER

Pet's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Adoption \_\_\_\_\_

Feeding Schedule

Morning \_\_\_\_\_

Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_

Night \_\_\_\_\_

Medicine/Treatments

Morning \_\_\_\_\_

Afternoon \_\_\_\_\_

Night \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Veterinarian Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Notes \_\_\_\_\_

**REMEMBER:** If you must evacuate, take your pet(s) with you!

The Oregon Humane Society encourages pet owners to keep their pets in mind when preparing for disaster or an emergency. While the sun is still shining, consider packing a “pet survival” kit which could be easily deployed if disaster hits.

In order to contain and control your pets during an evacuation, you'll need a harness and leash for each rabbit. In choosing a rabbit carrier, choose one that is large enough to serve as a temporary apartment for your rabbit.

Pre-pack your pet's kit in a backpack for ease in transportation and include supplies for at least one week. Include pellets, water, serving dishes, small litter box, hay and plastic bags for waste disposal. Pet first aid kits and vaccination records are a must.

Remember any pet medication, favorite toy or bed, and some treats.

Tag, microchip, and photograph your pets. Current identification is the single most important thing you can do to help ensure that you will be reunited with a lost pet. Make certain your pet is with visible identification tags with your phone number. A microchip implant is a secure form of identification that can't be lost. Be sure to carry a photograph with you to increase the likelihood of finding a missing pet.

**Tip:** If your cell phone has the camera feature, take and store photos of your pets on your cell phone.



OREGON  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY

OregonHumane.org

**DONATE *your* RIDE**

**HONK IF  
YOU LIKE TAX  
DEDUCTIONS**



Donate your ride to a good cause: the animals! Visit our website or call Marsha at 503-416-7079





Founded in 1868, the Oregon Humane Society fosters an environment of respect, responsibility, and compassion for all animals through education, legislation and leadership. With your support, we take care of the homeless, defend the abused, and fight with unrelenting diligence for the recognition of the integrity of all animals.