

European rabbit

Oryctolagus cuniculus

🇫🇷 Lapin · 🇩🇪 Kaninchen



REGULATIONS

Companion animal

OPAn: mandatory pair/group housing; minimum space, shelters, hiding areas; daily exercise. Larger holdings: health/marking duties may apply. Professional trade requires competence.



LIFESPAN

10–15 years



ADULT WEIGHT

1–10 kg



LIFESTYLE

Diurnal



BODY TEMPERATURE

38.5–39.5 °C



SEXUAL MATURITY

4–7 months



GESTATION

28–34 days



LITTER / CLUTCH SIZE

2–6



Habitat & environment

Type — Free roam, semi-free roam, enclosure or large cage with regular outings, sheltered from draughts

Substrate — Towels, DryBed®/VetBed®, Toftbo® mats, yoga mat or blanket. Plant-based bedding: Nulldor® (fir wood), hemp, recycled paper. Avoid cedar and pine.

Exercise — At least 2–3 hours daily to stimulate gut transit and prevent obesity

Equipment

- Hay rack
- Heavy food bowl
- Heavy water bowl (refresh daily). Low-lime/calcium water: risk of urinary sludge and stones.
- Hideout (small house, cardboard box, tunnel)



Behaviour

The rabbit is a gregarious animal, very sensitive to environmental changes. It tolerates solitude poorly. Needs a consistent routine (feeding/care), ample space to move, and hideouts to feel safe. Sudden changes (noise, smells, moving the enclosure) are stressful.

Social life — Gregarious. Do not house with guinea pigs (Bordetella risk, different needs). Ideally kept as a compatible pair/group; neutering helps reduce conflict and marking. Introduce gradually on neutral ground with supervision.

Activity cycle — Crepuscular/diurnally flexible: most active at dawn and dusk. Keep midday quiet. Provide daily safe exercise and foraging/chewing activities to prevent boredom.

Enrichment

- Scratching mat
- Species-appropriate toys
- Tunnels
- Cardboard boxes



Nutrition

Strict herbivore. Hay/grass ad libitum (80% of the ration). Provides dental wear and good digestibility.

Daily base



Grass

Fresh



Hay

Timothy, Crau, mountain or cereal hay



Vegetables & greens

100 g/kg/day, at least 3 different ones per day. Prefer leafy greens.



Carrot Greens



Radish Greens

 **Artichoke**
Feuilles

 **Cat Grass**

 **Basil**

 **Swiss Chard**

 **Broccoli**
Feuilles

 **Dandelion**

 **Clover**

 **Plantain**

 **Hazelnut Leaves**

 **Burnet**

 **Hogweed**

 **Celery**
Feuille et branche

 **Spinach**

 **Celery Root**

 **Chervil**

 **Curly Endive**

 **Endive**

 **Cabbage**
En quantité faible

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Pellets & supplements

Recommended brands : Oxbow · Supreme Science Selective · Beaphar · Versele Laga

Pellets (uniform shape only — never seed mixes / muesli) should be given in small quantity: maximum 20 g/kg of body weight per day. For a 2 kg rabbit, that's about 1 tablespoon per day. For a rabbit that already eats hay ad libitum and varied fresh greens, pellets are not essential. Giving too much daily favours several problems: - Teeth: pellets are too soft to wear down teeth properly, which can lead to dental malocclusion. - Weight: their high caloric density favours overweight then obesity. - Digestion: imbalance of gut flora, slower transit, diarrhoea. In short: hay and greens first, pellets as a discrete supplement if needed.

 **Pellets**

★ **Treats (occasional)**

Not essential, rich in carbohydrates and sugars. Considered as treats. Can be given as enrichment, in small quantities, 1 to 2 times per week.

 **Carrot**

 **Bell Pepper**

 **Turnip**

 **Orange**

 **Strawberry**

 **Apple**

 **Pear**

TO AVOID

 **Soy**

 **Avocado**

 **White Cabbage**

 **Onion**

 **Garlic**

 **Sorrel**

 **Potato**

 **Tomato Leaves**

 **Leek**

 **Rhubarb**

 **Peels**

 **Bread**

 **Sweets**

 **Chocolate**

 **Cereal Bars**

 **Dried Fruits**

Health & prevention

Preventive medicine

Deworming if symptomatic (faecal exam recommended).
Encephalitozoon screening (blood test).

Vaccination

Rabbit haemorrhagic disease (RHD) is fatal. Vaccination recommended every 6 months (outdoor) or yearly (indoor).
Myxomatosis: vaccine not authorised in Switzerland.

Surgery & neutering

Spaying (5 months) / castration (4–5 months). Prevents uterine tumours (50–80% of females over 4 years), aggression and marking.

Common conditions

Dental malocclusion (incisors and molars)

SYMPTOMS Selective anorexia, hypersalivation, bruxism, weight loss, watery eyes

PREVENTION Hay ad libitum, fibrous leafy greens, dental check 1–2×/year; avoid free-feeding pellets

WARNING SIGNS

- Gut stasis
- Loss of appetite
- Urinary, neurological or ocular disorders

If any of these symptoms appear, prompt veterinary care is essential.
Contact an exotic-pet vet as soon as possible.

Gastrointestinal stasis (ileus)

SYMPTOMS Reduced/no appetite and defecation, abdominal pain, hunched posture

PREVENTION Very high-fibre diet (hay), hydration, pain and stress management; consult quickly if anorexia >12 h

Upper respiratory infections ("snuffles")

SYMPTOMS Sneezing, nasal discharge, conjunctivitis, abnormal breathing sounds

PREVENTION Low-dust bedding, good ventilation, stress reduction; dental follow-up if chronic signs

Pododermatitis (sore hocks)

SYMPTOMS Redness/calluses/ulcers on the hocks, lameness, pain

PREVENTION Soft, dry surfaces, clean bedding, weight control, padded resting areas

Urinary disorders (calcium sludge, cystitis, stones)

SYMPTOMS Thick/chalky urine, haematuria, straining to urinate, perineal soiling

PREVENTION Constant access to water, activity, balanced diet (limit alfalfa in adults), weight control

Skin disorders and external parasites (Cheyletiella, fleas, fly strike in summer)

SYMPTOMS Dandruff/itching, areas of hair loss; in summer, possible infested wounds

PREVENTION Coat hygiene, dry bedding, regular inspection (daily in summer), rabbit-safe antiparasitics

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The online sheet is updated regularly with enriched content: new photos, refreshed recommendations, related advice articles. Scan this code to open the web version of this sheet.

 [Open the online sheet](https://nacvet.ch/en/species/rabbit) — nacvet.ch/en/species/rabbit



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