



Does your rabbits' food look like this?

If so, they are more likely to develop painful dental and digestive disease.

We now know that the way pet rabbits are commonly fed is leading to painful dental disease and digestive health problems.*

*Feeding rabbits and getting it right. Meredith, A. BSAVA Congress, 2013.

The 5 animal welfare needs



For more information on PDSA, its work and to find out how you can help support the charity by fundraising, volunteering or making a donation:
Call free on 0300 3737 224

Or write to:
PDSA Head Office, Whitechapel Way
Priorslee, Telford, Shropshire TF2 9PQ.

PDSA would like to thank Brigitte Lord BVetMed(Hons) CertZooMed MRCVS, Lecturer in Rabbit Medicine and Surgery, University of Edinburgh, for helping to compile this leaflet.



This leaflet is produced by PDSA, with support from the British Small Animal Veterinary Association, the British Veterinary Association, the British Veterinary Nursing Association, the British Veterinary Zoological Society, RSPCA, the Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund and Wood Green the Animals Charity.



The correct way to feed your rabbits and keep their teeth healthy



What's the problem?

Unlike human teeth, rabbit teeth grow constantly throughout their life. Because of this, rabbits need to spend lots of their time nibbling and chewing to wear their teeth down.

Otherwise their teeth grow too long and start to grow sharp spikes, which dig into their tongue and cheeks. This causes mouth ulcers and is painful. Because many rabbits aren't fed enough hay or grass, vets frequently come across this problem.



How can I make sure my rabbits are nibbling and chewing enough?

Rabbits need to eat lots of hay or grass, as they do in the wild. The problem is that many rabbits are fed rabbit 'muesli' – a mix of seeds and flakes – and not enough hay or grass. Muesli doesn't wear their teeth down and, because rabbits often leave the bits they don't like, this also causes nutrient deficiencies.

Can I feed fruit?

You should only give fruit occasionally and in small quantities because it is high in sugar. Apples, grapes, pears, plums, strawberries and tomatoes (but not tomato leaves) are some of the fruits that are suitable in small amounts (for example, 1/8th of an apple or pear, given occasionally).

My rabbits eat their droppings. Is this normal?

Rabbits eat some of their droppings so they can get the full goodness out of their high-fibre food, so don't be concerned if you see this.

How do I know if one of my rabbits has dental problems?

Signs include:

GOING OFF THEIR FOOD • DRIBBLING • WEIGHT LOSS • RUNNY EYES • DIRTY BOTTOM

Runny eyes can develop because the abnormal tooth roots grow backwards and can affect the eyes.

The bottom can become dirty because the sore mouth makes licking and grooming too painful.

Visit your vet if any of your rabbits show any of these signs.

There can be other causes of overgrown teeth (e.g. if a rabbit is born with teeth that don't meet properly) but the commonest cause is being fed rabbit 'muesli' and not enough hay or grass.



How should I feed my rabbits?

Vets recommend the following diet for healthy adult rabbits, alongside constantly available fresh drinking water:

- At least their own body size in good quality **hay** each day (so if you put the daily amount of hay next to your rabbits, it should be at least as big as them). As a rule, either fresh hay or **growing grass** (not grass clippings) should always be available.

And

- An adult-sized handful of suitable fresh **greens** morning and evening.

And

- Just a tablespoon of rabbit **nuggets** once daily (or twice daily if the rabbits weigh over 3.5kg).

✗ **DON'T FEED RABBIT MUESLI**

The diet recommended above may be different to the way you are feeding your rabbits at the moment. If so, you should change their food. But don't change it suddenly, as this can upset their digestive system. If you feed rabbit muesli at the moment, gradually reduce the amount you give each day, over around 2–4 weeks, and replace it with the diet described above (hay/grass, greens and nuggets). If your rabbits don't appear interested in hay, get them checked by a vet as this can be a sign of dental disease.

Constant access to a large exercise run on grass will encourage rabbits to graze, while also letting them get the exercise they need.



**DON'T FEED
RABBIT
MUESLI**

Which greens can I feed?

Aim to feed a few different greens each day. The list below shows some greens that are safe to feed, and some that aren't. There are many others not on the list. If you're not sure whether you can safely feed a certain plant or vegetable to your rabbits, ask your vet for advice. Remember to always introduce new foods gradually.

SAFE

- ✓ Asparagus
- ✓ Blackberry leaves
- ✓ Broccoli
- ✓ Cabbage
- ✓ Carrots (only feed occasionally – they are high in sugar. The leafy tops are high in calcium which is good for your rabbits)
- ✓ Cauliflower
- ✓ Celery
- ✓ Courgette
- ✓ Cucumber
- ✓ Mint
- ✓ Parsley
- ✓ Salad peppers
- ✓ Radish tops
- ✓ Rocket
- ✓ Swede
- ✓ Spinach
- ✓ Turnip
- ✓ Watercress

UNSAFE

- ✗ Grass clippings
- ✗ Clematis
- ✗ Foxglove
- ✗ Ivy
- ✗ Lilies
- ✗ Lily of the valley
- ✗ Laburnum
- ✗ Poppies
- ✗ Privet
- ✗ Ragwort
- ✗ Rhododendron
- ✗ Rhubarb leaves

