Grooming Your Pet Rabbit

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Brushing

Rabbits, like cats, are quite fastidious and spend part of each day grooming themselves. To help them and prevent them from swallowing excess hair, especially when they are shedding, it is helpful to brush them at least once a week. More frequent brushing may be necessary in times of heavy shedding or for long-haired rabbits.

While brushing your rabbit, look for any signs of skin disease such as flaky skin, sores, bald areas, or parasites (fleas, mites, ticks, etc.). Using a flea comb in addition to a brush will help you detect any parasites. If you see anything abnormal, have the condition checked by your veterinarian. Mats can be a problem, especially with long-haired rabbits. Because their skin is delicate, use extreme care when trying to remove a mat. It is best to use a mat rake or splitter with a fine blade to remove a mat. If you are unsure of how to remove a mat, have the mat removed by a groomer or veterinarian.

Bathing

Rabbits do not enjoy being bathed; it can actually be extremely stressful to them and cause more harm than good. It is rarely necessary to bathe a rabbit, and is not recommended.

Ears

Regularly check your rabbit's ears for any parasites, inflammation, or wax buildup. Wax buildup may be removed using a cotton ball soaked in a mild ear cleansing solution, such as one containing chlorhexidine. Be careful not to push any wax down into the ear canal. If the ears are red or have a discharge, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian.

Eyes

Your rabbit's eyes should be clear and free from discharge. If you notice anything abnormal, have your rabbit's eyes checked by your veterinarian.

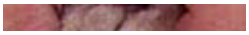
Nails and feet

Check your rabbit's feet on a weekly basis. Look for accumulated fecal material and any redness or sores. Pododermatitis (infection of the feet and hocks) can become very serious and is best treated if identified early.

Rabbits nails can become quite long, and like a dog or cat, need regular trimming. To trim the nails:

1. Assemble what you will need - a high quality pair of trimmers and some styptic powder, Kwik-Stop, CutStop Styptic Pads or other product to stop bleeding if you nick the quick.
2. Have someone else hold your rabbit and/or wrap your rabbit in a towel. Hold your rabbit's foot and look at the nail. Locate where the quick ends. The quick is a blood vessel that runs down the middle of your rabbit's nail. With clear or light nails, it is easy to see the pink color where the quick ends.
3. Using a nail trimmer cut the nail below the quick on a 45-degree angle. You will be cutting off the finer point. Make several small nips with the clippers instead of one larger one. This is especially important in rabbits with dark nails, as it is harder to see the quick.
4. In some cases, if the nails are brittle, the cut may tend to splinter the nail. In these cases, file the nail in a sweeping motion starting from the back of the nail and following the curve to the tip. Several strokes will remove any burrs and leave the nail smooth.
5. If your rabbit will tolerate it, do all four feet this way. If he will not, take a break.
6. If you accidentally cut the quick, wipe off the blood and apply Kwik-Stop or styptic powder to stop the bleeding. It is not serious and will heal in a very short time.
7. Remember, it is better to trim a small amount on a regular basis than to try and remove large portions. Try to trim your rabbit's nails regularly. The 'quick' grows as the nail grows, so if you wait a long time between cuttings, the quick will be closer to the end of the nail. This means more likelihood of bleeding during trimming.

Teeth



A rabbit's teeth are continually growing. Generally, the wear on the teeth through gnawing and

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eating is equal to the growth of the teeth, so the teeth basically stay the same length. Some rabbits may have malocclusion, which means their teeth do not meet each other normally. When this happens, the teeth do not wear down like they should, and small spurs can develop. A veterinarian can trim off the excess. Regularly check your rabbit's teeth for any abnormalities. If your rabbit starts to drool, not eat well, or paw at his mouth, have your rabbit examined by your veterinarian.

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