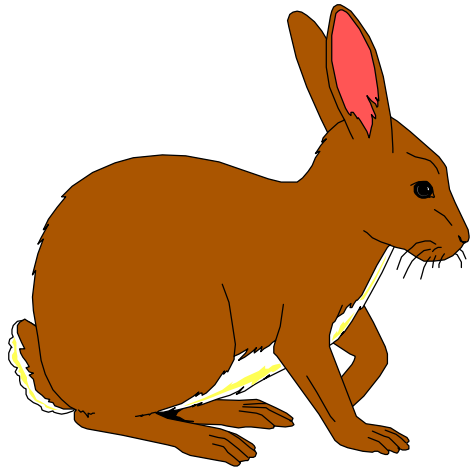


# Elands Veterinary Clinic.

## CLIENT INFORMATION SHEET.

### RABBITS, GUINEA PIGS, CHINCHILLAS AND OTHER RODENTS



#### Elands Veterinary Clinic.

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Recent surveys have shown that rabbits are the third most common pet after dogs and cats, but when you also consider the number of guinea pigs, chinchillas and small rodents that are kept then this group of animals represents a huge pet population. It is for this reason why Elands does not discriminate between these small mammals and the dog or cat, and so we are happy to provide advice on neutering, vaccination, housing, diet, breeding and can provide a first opinion and second opinion referral service for the medical and surgical care of these animals. Providing such a level of care for these animals is not commonplace and Elands regularly receives referrals from other veterinary practices throughout London and the South-East.

#### HOUSING

There are a number of specially constructed hutches and cages for small mammals. It is important that all accommodation has sufficient ventilation to prevent poor air flow and respiratory diseases. Rabbits, guinea pigs and rats are particularly at risk from *Pasteurella pneumonia* which is an insidious disease which can be very difficult to treat successfully once established. Cage materials must obviously be nontoxic and there are a variety of safe manufactured cage furnishings and toys available. Be aware that straw and hay may harbour ectoparasites like fleas and mites that can cause skin problems. Newspaper on the floor and shredded paper for bedding is easy to keep clean and cheap to replace. Outside hutches must be escape and fox proof and locking bolts are advisable. The hutch/cage, food and water bowls should be cleaned regularly using Tamodine-E or Ark-Klens which is available from reception.

#### NUTRITION

The nutrition of these animals varies from the herbivorous guinea pigs and rabbits to the omnivorous rat. However there are several high quality manufactured foods specifically designed for individual species. In general these diets are well balanced as long as you feed the correct food to the correct animal. For example, feeding guinea pigs on rabbit food will soon cause signs of vitamin C deficiency (scurvy), and therefore guinea pigs should be offered a vitamin C supplemented food or provided with additional vitamin C in their water such as BSP drops (available from reception). Most of the commercially available "muesli type" foods are too high in protein and fat and too low in fibre. For rabbits especially, this may result in diarrhoea, obesity and teeth problems while in most species it can cause obesity unless the pet's weight is accurately monitored. In breeding, old, sick or stressed individuals additional vitamins in the form of BSP drops may be beneficial. Rabbits and guinea pigs are particularly prone to diarrhoea, especially if their diet is lacking in fibre. It is therefore essential that these animals are provided with good quality diet such as **Supa Rabbit Excel** and high quality hay (e.g. Timothy hay) at all times.

#### VACCINATION

##### a) MYXOMATOSIS

Myxomatosis is a viral disease that only affects rabbits. It is usually spread by direct contact with wild rabbits, and blood sucking parasites e.g. fleas, mites, & mosquito's. The signs are pronounced swelling of the eyes and face, lethargy, anorexia, depression and in nearly all cases the rabbit dies within 4-10 days. This problem can strike at any time but it seems to be most prevalent in the spring and autumn months. There is no cure but you can protect your rabbits by having them annually vaccinated. Pregnant does cannot be vaccinated but the young can from 6 weeks of age.

##### b) VIRAL HAEMORRHAGIC DISEASE

This is another fatal viral disease that only affects rabbits. It only entered the

country during the early 1990's but has since spread throughout the South-East and into much of England. Cases are sporadic at the present time but because of the number of naive rabbits in the country, that is rabbits that have never had any exposure to the disease, there is a real danger of epizootic outbreaks and large scale die-offs. Again there is no cure, but you can protect your rabbits with a yearly vaccination.

#### DIARRHOEA

Rabbits and guinea pigs fed a diet too low in fibre and roughage may suffer from diarrhoea, and in these cases providing good quality hay (e.g. Timothy hay) is all important. Bacterial gastroenteritis is life-threatening and prompt treatment is essential. Your pet may be prescribed antibiotics (based on a faecal bacterial culture) which will usually be administered directly by mouth or in drinking water. In both cases the use of a probiotic like Avipro (available from reception) helps to re-stabilise the normal gut flora and speed recovery.

#### OVERGROWN TEETH

All rabbits and rodents have open root teeth, that is they never stop growing. Animals with overgrown teeth are usually off their food, salivate excessively, lose weight and become depressed or even bad tempered. Congenital disorders from inbreeding, jaw or tooth damage and infection can cause the teeth to go out of alignment and because they do not meet each other so they do not get worn down, instead they grow excessively long. Traditionally, the treatment was tooth clipping. However, this is no longer recommended as clipping a conscious rabbit can be painful and the physical act of clipping may cause the teeth to fracture making the condition worse. While Elands will continue to clip your pet's teeth at your request we would urge you to consider the better alternatives. Firstly, if the problem is congenital (first seen in rabbits less than a year of age) then incisor extraction under a general anaesthetic offers a permanent cure which over the life span of the rabbit also represents a financial saving. If the problem is acquired through damage or infection then burring the teeth with a high speed dental burr under a sedative means that the teeth can be cut closer to the gum line without the danger of splitting the teeth. In practice this means fewer visits to the vets for you and your rabbit.

#### NEUTERING

Any rabbit or rodent can be neutered for health or management reasons. It is not uncommon for female rabbits to suffer from uterine adenocarcinoma (cancer of the womb), however this can largely be prevented by removing the ovaries and uterus (ovariohysterectomy) at 4-6 months of age. Males and sometimes even females may be less than friendly to you their owner or their cage-mates. These aggressive tendencies, including the 'grumpy bunny syndrome' can often be reduced by neutering.

#### FURTHER INVESTIGATION AND SURGERY

As clinicians we find it a great help to take samples (urine, faeces, blood, vomit, hair, skin scrapings, biopsies) for laboratory analysis. It helps us make a diagnosis and treat your pet more effectively.

Anaesthesia for rabbits and rodents was often considered a major problem. At Elands we have invested in the safest anaesthetic for small mammals, isoflurane. The practice has also gone to great expense to provide specialist equipment for small mammals including high detail radiography film, fibre-optic endoscopy, blood analysers, electrosurgery and hospitalisation facilities.

Only the most basic and common diseases have been outlined above and so if you have a problem with your rabbit or rodent please don't hesitate to contact the practice for an appointment. It would be helpful if you bring your pet on newspaper (not shavings, straw or hay) in a secure box.