



Hay is the Basis of a Healthy Diet

The uncontrolled feeding of a pelleted diet to a house rabbit can lead to obesity, heart and liver disease. Chronic diarrhea and kidney disease as a result of the high concentration of calories, low fiber and high calcium levels in the pellets," says Dr. Susan Brown of the Midwest Bird & Exotic Animal Hospital in Westchester, Illinois.

The House Rabbit Society is hearing of more and more rabbits who do poorly on a diet of pellets. Some rabbits are experiencing chronic intermittent diarrhea, some produce too many cecal pellets and many are very overweight. Rabbits do not need a diet of pellets. Pellets are just convenience food, like feeding kids a Big Mac every meal.

Pellet diets were originally formulated as an efficient, economical, easy to use way to promote rapid growth and weight gain in rabbits raised for meat or fur, rabbits not meant to live very long. This is not the goal we want for our companion house rabbits who are expected to live out their full life potential of 8-10 years.

The House Rabbit Society recommends a diet of unlimited fresh Timothy hay, a variety of vegetables and very limited pellets (if at all). "The uncontrolled feeding of pellets has done more damage than good to house rabbits in our experience over the years, and many rabbits in our practice do not even get pellets any more," reports Dr. Brown. In particular, rabbits on free choice hay need no pellets.

"Removing pellets from the diets of some of our rabbits was a traumatic experience (for us, not for the rabbits). We had been a proponent of a diet consisting primarily of pellets, but as our foster rabbits have aged, many have come down with chronic problems of clumpy or runny diarrhea and others have become quite obese. We also receive many phone calls describing rabbits with chronic diarrhea. These rabbits have been through every conceivable test to try to diagnose the problem. The owner has gone from one veterinarian to another trying to find a solution and, finally, in desperation, they want us to take their rabbit because of the mess and the time involved in constantly bathing these rabbits.

The Missouri chapter of the House Rabbit Society favors feeding unlimited amounts of 2nd cut Timothy hay which can be ordered through American Pet Diner via their website: www.americanpetdiner.com Alfalfa does not contain enough fiber to produce the desired large, light colored fecal pellets that indicate optimum digestive health.

If you cannot resist supplementing the hay diet with pellets, avoid the packaged pellets containing dried bananas, nuts and seeds. This product is too high in sugar and carbohydrates, and can cause obesity, diarrhea and other serious digestive upsets. Nuts and seeds in packaged pellets could be deadly to your rabbit. Limit your rabbit to plain, fresh looking, dark green rabbit pellets, giving a maximum of ¼ cup per 5 lbs. of ideal body weight per day, but preferably no more than a tablespoon as a treat. Buy pellets with fiber content no less than 18% and only in a quantity you will use within one month. Store pellets in air-tight containers and keep away from moisture. Discard pellets that are old, moist or bug-infested.



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