

You Look Marvelous! Tips for grooming.



Courtesy of:
**Ontario Rabbit
Education Organization**
www.ontariorabbits.org

Grooming time is a good time to get to know your rabbit and to check for lumps, fleas, urine burn, sore hocks and other potential problems. It is recommended that you groom your rabbit weekly.

SHEDDING

Rabbits generally molt four times a year, alternating between heavy and light sheds. Typical shed patterns include a quick, overall full-body shed; tufts; or a shed that starts at the head and works its way down the back. Regardless of how your rabbit sheds, brushing, petting your rabbit with damp hands, or gently plucking off loose tufts of fur are all effective means of removing loose fur.

Suggested brush/comb type tools for removing loose fur from your pet include wire slicker brushes, Zoom Grooms (a rubber brush that is made by the Kong Dog Toy Company), rubber grooming gloves, plastic or metal combs, or shedding blades (a tool with a serrated edge that is dragged lightly across the rabbit's fur). Whatever tool you choose, it is important to remove loose hair so that your rabbit doesn't ingest too much while grooming himself. Like cats, rabbits spend a lot of time grooming themselves, but unlike cats, rabbits can't vomit. Regular grooming will prevent your pet from ingesting too much hair, which can lead to gastrointestinal problems.

Longhaired: Longhaired breeds require special care that includes daily brushing and grooming regimens, therefore these types of rabbit are not recommended for children or busy families.

Longhaired rabbits have powdery white dander that produces a webbing effect in their fur and causes mats to develop close to the skin. Some owners invest in a professional 'angora pet blower' to blow air through the rabbit's DRY fur and release the dander to prevent matting. You can also use a hairdryer on high speed, COOL setting. Do not use heat, as it will dry the skin and cause more dander. Do not direct the air towards the face, ears or genitals. These devices can be noisy: if the noise appears to upset or stress the rabbit stop using it.

Metal combs and mat rakes are most effective for grooming longhaired rabbits. Keeping the fur clipped short will help to keep matting to a minimum and make grooming a bit easier.

Matting: Rabbit skin is very delicate and can tear easily. If your rabbit has become matted, try to use a dematting tool or a mat rake to gently try to break up the mats. If you are extremely careful, and are able to feel where the skin ends and the mat begins, you can snip into the mat with small grooming (blunt) scissors and gently work at what's left with a metal comb. A few small snips can help to break the mat apart, making it easier to comb out. When using scissors, make sure that you do not pull the fur up to clip it (which increases your chances of snipping the skin) and always hold your fingers between the rabbit's skin and the scissors. If the mats are too severe, you may have to get your rabbit shaved by your veterinarian. Because it is easy to nick or scrape a rabbit's skin while shaving, only someone experienced in grooming rabbits should shave your pet.

NAIL TRIMS

Like dogs, rabbits need to have their nails cut. Nails that have grown too long can become snagged in the carpet and break, which is very painful. Use a guillotine or scissor-type nail cutter to trim the nails. Nails should be cut every 4-8 weeks, depending upon rate of growth. You can use an emery board (nail file) between cuttings to stop the nails from becoming too sharp.

When cutting your rabbit's nails, be careful not to cut the quick (blood vessel inside of the nail). The quick is easy to see inside of light toenails, but it can be obscured in darker coloured nails. Holding a flashlight under dark coloured nails will help you to see the quick. Have styptic powder on hand to help stop the bleeding in case the blood vessel is accidentally cut.

Different techniques for cutting your pet's nails include the following:

'Bunny Burrito Wrap': Securely wrap the rabbit in a towel (this is called a 'Bunny Burrito Wrap'), cover

his eyes and hold him on your lap, securing him in place with your arm. Pull one foot out of the towel at a time and firmly hold it while clipping each nail. If you use this nail cutting technique, be sure that the rabbit is wrapped securely enough that he can not struggle, but not so tightly that the rabbit is uncomfortable. Covering a rabbit's eyes may calm him down.

Cradling: Cradle your rabbit on his back like you are holding a baby, or hold him in your lap. Gently pet his face and nose to help him to relax. Always be sure to sit on the floor when cutting a bunny's nails in this position. Some rabbits will startle with little or no warning. If you are sitting on the floor, the rabbit is less likely to fall or jump from your lap and hurt himself. Slowly return the rabbit to the upright position after you've finished cutting his nails.



A Little Help from a Friend: Some rabbits may struggle and not allow you to cut their nails by yourself. To avoid overstressing the rabbit have a friend hold the rabbit in a comfortable position while you cut the nails (or vice versa).

Ask your veterinarian for other suggestions or tips. You may have to experiment with several different nail cutting techniques before finding the one that you and your rabbit are most comfortable with. If you are not comfortable cutting your rabbit's nails yourself, you will have to take your rabbit to the veterinarian for regular nail trims.

While cutting the nails, take the opportunity to check the feet for sore hocks. On some rabbits, you will see calluses on the heels. This is normal, as long as they are pink - not red, sore or irritated.

CHECK YOUR RABBIT'S UNDERSIDE

You should regularly check the underside of your rabbit, making sure that his bottom end is clean. Overweight and disabled rabbits will have a difficult time reaching their anus and may have a problem with hardened cecals getting stuck to their fur. Occasionally your rabbit's scent glands, which are located on both sides of the genital mound, may need to be cleaned. If you take your thumb and index finger and gently

press on the area beside the genital mound, the scent glands will become visible. A bit of a pungent odor and some dark waxy material are normal. If the waxy material is hardened, you can gently use a moistened Q-tip or soft cloth to soften it and drag it away from the area. Do not dig or irritate this area.

CLEANING

Bathing can be extremely stressful for a rabbit. For this reason, rabbits should not be bathed. If a part of your rabbit becomes soiled (i.e., his bottom end from loose stool), you can spot bathe that part of the rabbit. It is best to use a moistened cloth to clean that area or to hold the rabbit's rear under warm running water and gently remove the soiled parts with your fingers. If bathing is unavoidable, never immerse the entire rabbit in water. Instead, put enough warm water in the sink so that the level is up to his belly. Sit his back feet in the water and, with your hand under the bunny's chest, gradually lower his front feet into the sink. Use a small cup and slowly pour water over the rabbit to soak and rinse his body, staying away from his face and ears. Only use warm water to bathe your pet. If water doesn't sufficiently clean the bunny, consult a rabbit savvy veterinarian for a shampoo that is safe to use on your rabbit.

Rabbits take a long time to dry. In the winter or in cold climates, you can use a hair dryer on the low setting (NOT on face or genitals) to help dry the rabbit. Keep the dryer at least 12" from the bunny. It is best, however, to towel dry the rabbit, keeping him away from drafts, the air conditioning vent, etc., until he is thoroughly dry.

EARS

Check your rabbit's ears for wax build up. This is especially important for lop breeds and rear leg amputees. A cotton swab or your fingernail can be used to remove the wax from the outer canal. To avoid pushing the wax further down into the ear canal, do not stick the cotton swab further down than you can see. To clean the ears deep down, use a commercial ear cleaner. Your veterinarian can recommend one that is appropriate for your rabbit.

Also, be sure to check the ears for mites. Mites make the ears appear red, crusty and sore. Often, rabbits with mites will dig excessively at their ears and shake their heads frequently. Ears with a rank odour (possible infection) or ears with pus inside should be checked by your veterinarian immediately.

More detailed grooming information can be found on our web site.