



GROOMING YOUR RABBIT

Rabbits need to maintain their coats/fur throughout their lives. The frequency and depth of grooming needed will depend on the breed of the rabbit. Fur length and thickness will be a factor, as well as the ability of the rabbit to efficiently groom itself. Rabbits don't require baths unless it is absolutely necessary. Giving a rabbit a bath can "shock" it and trigger a bad response and possibly injury/illness.

How to Groom Your Rabbit

Grooming is important for a rabbit's overall health. Yes, rabbits do quite a bit of their own grooming, but that means ingesting their fur and risking the potential of problems such as hair balls and intestinal blockage.

- Most rabbits require grooming by their owners 3 times per week. The grooming process can be stressful for a rabbit, as it means a lot of handling, manipulating, pulling of fur, cutting nails, etc.
- To reduce their stress, you can help them by making positive associations with the grooming process by using treats, stroking (head rub) and gentle talking. They will associate these nice things and actions with you all the time.
- Grooming can also be a very pleasant, relaxing and bonding experience for both you and your rabbit. If you put in the time and care needed, you and your rabbit will look forward to these grooming sessions instead of dreading them.

Ready, set, GROOM!

There are times when the grooming frequency may need to increase. A rabbit sheds, on average, every 3 months and when shedding occurs, it will need more of your attention and time to groom. A rabbit's skin is very sensitive, so take care not to brush with too much vigor or to shave too close when using clippers. (Bristled brushes are preferred over metal combs and brushes).

It is suggested that you follow up a grooming session by doing a final "sweep" with a rubber grooming tool/glove like a Zoom Groom. End the grooming session with a relaxing massage and/or scratching/rubbing/petting those preferred "spots" that are irresistible to your rabbit. Try and offer a tasty treat during and after the grooming, to help with positive association during grooming.

Matting:

When grooming is not done often enough, fur matts (like dreadlocks) will start to form and often they will have to be shaved out. If you don't own or don't want to purchase clippers, your rabbit's veterinarian can take on this grooming challenge. If untended, matts can cause skin irritation, bruising and other skin conditions.

Accumulation of fecal matter on and around the anus area can cause discomfort and may even block the anus enough to prevent normal bowel movements. This is why it is important to investigate the "undercarriage" of your rabbit on a regular basis. It is often the case that you will need to shave the fecal matts from this area. Consult your veterinarian if you are not comfortable performing this procedure.

Feet:

Rabbits need to maintain healthy amounts of fur on their feet to prevent irritation or damage to the delicate skin beneath the fur. Any matts must be carefully removed and, if there is any irritation (from urine scald or otherwise), soft padding should be added to the rabbit's habitat or floor when your rabbit is enjoying exercise time around the home.

Scent glands:

Rabbits are territorial animals and will “mark” their territories or possessions with oily secretions from scent glands. The scent glands on either side of their anus can become impacted and will need to be cleaned to prevent infection and/or discomfort. If you detect an unusual odor from your rabbit, it may be that their scent glands need tending to. To clean this area, take a cotton swab dipped in mineral oil, locate the slits on either side of the rabbit’s genitals and moisten the waxy build up in those slits with the mineral oil swab. This will allow it to be easily removed. Take care not to tear the membrane that makes up the glands. Again, if you do not feel comfortable doing this, consult your veterinarian.

Ears:

Dirt, oil, wax and debris that can build up in the ears must be removed to prevent infection. Lop eared rabbits are especially susceptible to yeast or ear infections due to the ears creating a dark, warm and moist environment where yeast and bacteria thrive. Using a cotton swab, and taking great care not to insert it deep into the ear canal as you might with a dog, wax/debris can be removed. Consult your veterinarian to see if ear cleaning fluid is required to properly eliminate all debris.

Nails:

Allowing your rabbit’s nails to grow unchecked can result in broken nail injuries, discomfort and changes in mobility. Have your vet show you how to safely and effectively trim without “cutting the quick” i.e. severing the vein that extends from the toe almost to the very end of the nail. Have a jar of styptic powder handy (Kwik Stop) should this happen so you can stop the bleeding. There are a few different ways to position/restrain the rabbit for this procedure. Even if you are just removing a tiny sliver, trim rabbit’s nails each of the 3 times per week that you groom them, the nail clipping desensitization process will be strengthened and nail clipping will become stress-free. Otherwise, nail trimming must occur once a month at the very minimum.

Eyes:

Checking for and removing any debris, hair, etc. from your rabbit’s eyes should be a routine part of the grooming process. You can remove irritating or obtrusive hair around the eyes with a special tool like a “mascara” brush and small scissors or clippers, taking care not to touch or injure the actual eyeball. With a cotton swab or ball wetted down with warm water, you can remove hay, dirt, crust etc. from the eyes. If there is redness or continued irritation or discharge, consult your rabbit’s veterinarian.

Fleas and Mites:

Rabbits are susceptible to external parasites like fleas and mites. You can use a flea comb to check for flea/mite “dirt” (fecal matter). Consult your rabbit veterinarian before using flea/mite medication, as you will need to know the exact dosage and application methods.

Common tools used to groom a rabbit:

- Slicker brush or another type of brush designed to groom the specific fur type of your rabbit
- Fur splitter. Wide toothed comb for removing mats in fur
- Scissors for cutting out mats. (Use only after instruction on how to use scissors on rabbit)
- Mini shaver for certain breeds. We recommend the mini Arco by Wahl
- Nail clipping scissors, clippers and a small flashlight for back light
- Kwik Stop or other styptic powder to stop bleeding from nails
- Flea comb
- Disinfectant solution for cuts or injury to skin. Chlorhexaderm or Betadine solutions are good options to have on hand. (available at pharmacies)
- Mineral oil for cleaning sensitive scent gland areas on the rabbit
- Eye wash for cleaning the eye area
- Cotton balls (for cleaning)
- Q-tips for outer ear cleaning and scent gland cleaning
- Furminator, Fur buster, wide tooth and fine tooth combs, varied length combs, flea comb with handle.