

# Rabbits

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We frequently hear of front office staff giving the same information for the care of newborn or unweaned rabbits that is given for newborn kittens. However, the two situations should not be advised in the same way.

Following is a list that may be helpful to your staff in advising your clients.

## Newborn bunnies

- ✓ Rabbits feed their young only once (occasionally twice) daily.
- ✓ Mother rabbits will not stay with their young except for the brief period (perhaps 5 minutes) while they are feeding; often just before dawn.
- ✓ Mother is feeding the babies if their skin is not wrinkled and they are warm and in a bunch.
- ✓ Advise the caregiver to check once a day to determine if the mother is feeding her babies, and if so, do not disturb too much until the bunnies eyes are open at 10 days. If there is any doubt that the babies are being fed, have the caregiver weigh the babies once a day, at the same time. A postage or kitchen scale can be used. Nursing mothers do not reject their young for being handled.
- ✓ Even if the mother does not appear to be feeding the babies for the first couple of days, tell the caregiver NOT to remove the babies from the mother. The mother may be slow having her milk come in (the first feeding is often 24 hours after birth) and may be able to feed in a few days (sometimes up to 4 days after birth). Supplemental feedings must be given if the babies have not been fed during the first two days.

wooden crate, that the mother can easily fit into when standing on all four feet (in the feeding position). The box should not be too large, because the mother may step on the babies if she spends too much time in the nest box. Cut a high doorway (maybe 6 inches high), so that the babies can not accidentally fall out, but so that the mother can hop in. The babies should stay in this box until their eyes open at ten days and then the door can be cut lower so that the babies can move in and out of the box on their own.

- ✓ If the mother rabbit has not pulled any of her hair from her chest and legs to make a nest for the babies; advise your client to make a nest out of flannel, terry cloth or Kleenex®. The babies "bury" themselves in the nest material to keep warm and yet they must be able to quickly move to the top when their mother is ready to feed them. If the nest material is soiled it can easily be cleaned or replaced.

- ✓ The babies will need to be kept warm. This can be done by placing a heating pad, set on low, over one side of the box (make sure the mother can't get to the cord). But, if the mother has made a nest from her hair the temperature inside the clients house will keep the babies warm enough.

## Supplemental Feeding

- ✓ If some babies appear wrinkled or are not being fed, recommend that supplemental feedings be given once or twice a day.
- ✓ Supplemental feedings should consist of KMR (if never nursed by the mother, add lactobacillus acidophilus). At weaning add cecotroph or fecal gruel from the mother.
- ✓ The bunnies must be stimulated to urinate and defecate after each feeding. Have your client

(as the mother would use her tongue), to gently wipe the bunny bottoms.

- ✓ After their eyes are open, babies will gradually become interested in nibbling on alfalfa and a few pellets.
- ✓ The *House Rabbit Handbook* recommends the following formula requirements by age, for the total *daily* requirement. This should be fed in two feedings throughout the day if a bottle is used, or several feedings if a (less preferable) syringe is used. DO NOT feed the entire amount in one feeding as that could lead to serious and potentially lethal diseases (diarrhea, etc.).

Age	KMR	Acidophilus
Newborn	5cc	.5cc
1 wk. old	12-15cc	1cc
2 wk. old	25-27cc	1cc
3 wk. old	30 cc	2cc
Until weaned	30 cc	2cc

*(Karo syrup should not be added to KMR. Add Karo only if goat or cows milk must temporarily be used.)*

## Abandoned 2 to 6 Week Old Bunnies

Bunnies found, that have been living outside at this age (after their eyes are open), have already begun grazing on grass, leaves and plants. These bunnies can continue to be fed leafy greens while they are gradually introduced to alfalfa and pellets.

The caretaker can start by harvesting and washing grass, dandelions and other "weeds" from the yard. Then, they can add items from the grocery store such as parsley, red lettuce and carrot tops (introduce only one a day). The bunnies should also receive supplemental feedings of the KMR and acidophilus, or if these feedings are refused, have your clients sprinkle the acidophilus on the greens.

Bunnies over two weeks old seem to survive quite well on this diet as long as they are also kept warm.