

- Who should be contacted if there are any problems?
- Do you need to book an appointment for a check-up, or for stitches to be removed?
- How long should the rabbit be on cage rest? (usually 2 days for males, 5 or 6 for females)

When you get your rabbit home, put it in a disinfected cage indoors with comfortable bedding (e.g. clean towels or Vet Bed) and a clean litter tray or newspapers. Most vets use special suture techniques to prevent rabbits chewing at stitches, but you should still check the operation site daily for any discharge or swelling.

Males usually bounce back from their operation, but females may be quiet for a day or so. The most important thing is to get your rabbit eating, or the digestive system may grind to a halt. Vets try very hard to avoid this complication, using drugs to relieve pain and stimulate the gut, but you should be prepared to tempt the rabbit with nibbles of favourite food. Freshly picked grass or herbs often work. If your rabbit isn't eating by next morning, call the vet for advice. You should also monitor the rabbits' droppings for a few days and contact the vet if few or none are produced.

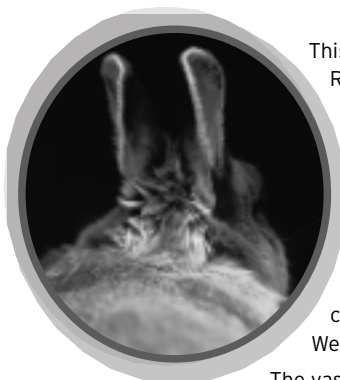
## If you have two rabbits.....

If you have two rabbits of the same sex living together, have them neutered at the same time and keep them together. If you have a male and a female, you need to be a bit more careful. Male rabbits remain fertile for up to 4 weeks after castration. Females must be kept away from males for about 14 days after being spayed. It's best to keep them separate (but in adjacent cages) except when you can supervise them very closely.

## Mix 'n' Match

Every bunny needs a friend. It's wonderful watching a bonded pair interact, but rabbits are territorial creatures - introductions must be gradual, and carefully supervised!

- Neutered male + spayed female is by far the easiest combination.
- Keeping two males or females together can be difficult or impossible unless they have grown up together. They must be neutered as soon as possible, and never separated, even for short periods of time.
- Seek expert advice before trying to introduce two rabbits of the same sex who are more than 3-4 months old.



This leaflet is brought to you by the Rabbit Welfare Fund - the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association (incorporating the British Houserabbit Association).

If you love rabbits, please consider supporting the Rabbit Welfare Fund, the charitable wing of the Rabbit Welfare Association.

The vast majority of RWF income comes from RWA members. As well as fund-raising activities, most RWA members kindly make a small donation to the RWF in addition to their annual £15 RWA membership fee. RWA members receive a fabulous quarterly magazine packed with health, behaviour and care advice to help you to build a wonderful relationship with your bunny - whether she/he lives indoors or out.

For more information about the RWA/RWF; or if you would like to make a donation to the RWF or join the RWA; please visit our website or call our helpline.

### To contact the RWA/Rabbit Welfare Fund:

- Ring the RWA National Helpline on **01403 267658**
- Write to us at PO Box 603, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 5WL
- Log on to our websites

<http://www.rabbitwelfare.co.uk/>  
<http://www.rabbitwelfarefund.co.uk>

Contact the National Helpline to order bulk supplies of leaflets (£5/100 copies for veterinary practices or pet shops; free of charge for rescue centres) or send SAE for single copies.



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# The RWF guide to having your rabbit neutered



Having your rabbit neutered is one of the most important steps you can take to help your pet enjoy a happy, healthy and long life.



The main reason to have your rabbit neutered is so you can keep more than one rabbit without them fighting or causing a population explosion. But there are other advantages too.

Neutered rabbits are less aggressive and territorial, and are more easily litter-trained if you want to keep your pet indoors as a houserabbit.



## Male rabbits

Male rabbits (bucks) make responsive pets, but have the same drawbacks as tom cats if they're not castrated. Most are territorial and frequently spray urine, and aggression is a common problem. They will also have to live alone, which isn't fair on an animal that needs company.

Neutered males are much happier and more relaxed. They can enjoy life without constantly looking for a mate and are less aggressive and smelly! Nearly all neutered males will stop spraying urine even if the operation is performed later in life.

Castration is a relatively minor operation which can be performed as soon as the testicles descend (10-12 weeks) although most vets wait until the rabbit is 4 or 5 months old, when the operation is easier to perform and the anaesthetic risk is reduced. The testicles are removed via the scrotum or lower abdomen.

## Female rabbits

Having female rabbits (does) spayed is even more important. Most females become territorial and aggressive from sexual maturity onwards (4-6 months). They have repeated false pregnancies, and may growl at, scratch and

bite their owners as well as attacking other rabbits. Keeping two females together - even if they are sisters - can make things worse. Spaying reduces and sometimes eliminates these behavioural problems. Spayed females are likely to live longer than their unsplayed sisters. Up to 80% of unsplayed female rabbits develop uterine cancer by 5 years of age.

Females who are not spayed when young and in good health may have to undergo the operation in later life if pyometra (uterine infection) or cancer develops, although usually it is too late and the cancer has already spread. Spaying is a bigger operation than castration. It's usually performed when the rabbit is at least 4 or 5 months old. The uterus and both ovaries are removed via the abdomen.

## Is it safe?

In the past, rabbits gained a reputation for being difficult to anaesthetise, but the risks of rabbit anaesthesia have fallen significantly in recent years. Surgery on healthy rabbits is almost as safe as in cats.

However, low risk does not mean no risk. Surgery on any animal can have unexpected complications. But for most rabbits the benefits of neutering far outweigh the very small risk.

Older rabbits and those in poor health are more difficult to neuter safely. If your pet rabbit is older than 3 years or has medical problems (such as obesity, dental disease or "snuffles" and related disorders) you must discuss the risks and benefits with your vet in order to choose the best option for your pet.

## Choosing the right vet

It's important to choose a suitable veterinary practice to neuter your rabbit. Like any other specialist field, vets vary in their interest and expertise in rabbit medicine. Some questions to ask when choosing a vet include:

- Do they recommend vaccinations for VHD and Myxomatosis?
- Do they regularly neuter rabbits of both sexes?
- Rabbits need special care on the day of surgery. Will the vet use heat pads and warmed fluid therapy? Has the practice invested in modern surgical and monitoring equipment to help make surgery safer for rabbits?
- Do they give pain relieving drugs to all rabbits during and after neutering operations? If not, choose another vet.
- Are rabbits hospitalised away from dogs, cats and ferrets?

If you already use a veterinary practice, ask whether they neuter rabbits. Most small animal vets neuter males, but unless your vet operates on a lot of rabbits you may be referred to another practice to have a female spayed.

## How much does it cost?

As a very rough guide, expect to pay £30-60 for a male rabbit to be castrated and £50-80 to spay a female.

## Pre-operative care

Take your rabbit to the vet well before the operation date for a health check and to discuss the procedure. Ask if any pre-operative blood tests are advised. Don't change the diet in the week or so before surgery. Rabbits can't vomit, so they don't need to be fasted before surgery. They should be offered food and water right up to the time of surgery and as soon as they wake up.

## Post operative care

Your rabbit should be awake, alert and preferably eating when you collect it after surgery. Remember to check:

- Has the rabbit been given pain relieving drugs? If not, request some.