

Greens and Pellets: Finding the Right Balance

One of the most debated topics among rabbit veterinarians, rescuers, and caretakers is the proper balance between hay, commercial rabbit food (“pellets”) and fresh produce (“greens”). For years some of the top rabbit veterinarians have promoted a “pelletless” diet (hay and greens only). Pellets were described as foods developed and sold for the convenience of breeders. Many caretakers have reported that their rabbits thrive on this diet and develop diarrhea when fed pellets.

Recently, however, a small but growing, number of caretakers with rabbits who suffer from chronic or recurrent episodes of “gas” or GI stasis have reported dramatic improvement after switching their rabbits to a diet void of any greens (i.e. just hay and pellets) or a diet where “greens” are fed only as an occasional “treat.” An animal nutritionist has suggested that the sheer variety of foods we offer our pampered house rabbits may create GI problems since each food must be digested in a slightly different way, sometimes even requiring a different microbial population. Both commercial rabbit food and fresh produce will be discussed below. If your rabbit has chronic or recurring GI problems, talk to your veterinarian about adjusting the pellets/greens ratio in his diet. If the problem worsens, discuss adjusting the ration in the **other** direction!



Six years ago Herman’s mom fed him the diet recommended by many rescue groups and some of the top U.S. rabbit veterinarians — unlimited hay, limited pellets, and a wide variety of greens. While many rabbits thrive on this diet, Herman suffered severe bouts of gas and GI stasis several times a year. His veterinarian recommended removing the greens from Herman’s diet. Since this was contrary to “conventional wisdom” in the rabbit world, Herman’s mom consulted directly with a top rabbit veterinarian who recommended removing **all** pellets from Herman’s diet. Herman’s GI problems worsened with this diet change and, fortunately, Herman’s mom recognized the cause-and-effect relationship. After speaking with a nutritionist, Herman’s mom decided to stop feeding greens and return pellets to Herman’s diet. Within 24 hours, Herman was feeling better and is a happy, healthy 11-year-old whose diet consists of hay and pellets. Herman’s story contains several lessons: 1) There is no one diet that is right for all rabbits. Diet should be tailored to each rabbit’s needs. 2) Diagnosis and treatment without a physical exam is risky at best. 3) Consultations should be between veterinarians.