

Keys to a Healthy Diet

For rabbits, a healthy diet is a balanced diet — just as it is for humans. Most experts agree that a rabbit's diet should consist of hay, fresh greens and vegetables, pellets, perhaps a small amount of fruit as a treat, and plenty of fresh water. However, you will hear a wide variety of opinions on what the proportions of each food group should be. Some veterinarians advocate a no pellet or very low pellet diet. While this works well for some rabbits, it is not right for all.

The proper balance of hay, vegetables, pellets, and fruit may be different for each rabbit in your home and may change for an individual rabbit as he grows older or as his health changes. The following are **general** guidelines for feeding healthy rabbits:

- Birth – 3 weeks: Mother's milk (or milk substitute) only
- 3–7 weeks: Mother's milk and small amounts (increasing gradually) of alfalfa hay and pellets
- 7–12 weeks: unlimited alfalfa hay and pellets
- 12 weeks – 7 months: unlimited alfalfa hay and pellets; gradually introduce vegetables (see *The Perfect Salad* for a list) one at a time
- 7 months – one year: gradually switch from alfalfa to grass and/or oat hay; gradually decrease pellets and increase vegetables; introduce small amounts of fruit
- 1–5 years: unlimited grass and/or oat hay; 1–3 cups vegetables per day per 5 pounds of rabbit; limited pellets (1/8–1/2 cup per day per 5 pounds of rabbit, depending on metabolism); small amounts of fruit (no more than 2 TBL per 5 pounds of rabbit)
- 6 years and over: unlimited grass and/or oat hay; vegetable, pellet, and fruit amounts may need to be adjusted, either up or down, to maintain a healthy weight.

Remember, hay is the most important part of your rabbit's diet — if he is not eating **lots** of hay, you may be feeding too many vegetables, pellets, or both. If your rabbit seems overweight, underweight, or if he is gaining or losing weight, consult your veterinarian for recommendations about adjusting his diet. All dietary changes should be made gradually and with your veterinarian's approval.