

Vet Etiquette

A good veterinarian is a priceless asset and should be treated with appreciation and respect. Just as it is important for your veterinarian to understand that you are the expert on what is normal for your rabbit, it is important for you to remember that your veterinarian is a professional with years of training and experience. Although you want her to be open to information from outside sources, she is not likely to appreciate it if you walk in with a copy of an e-mail, an article from the Internet, or this book and try to tell her how to do her job.

Outside information should always be presented as a starting point for discussion with your veterinarian, not a request for specific treatment. If you participate in rabbit e-mail groups, you will find a tremendous wealth of rabbit medical knowledge among the members — both from official rescuers and from individuals who seem to be "magnets" for rabbits with medical problems. However, please keep in mind that most of the people giving medical advice are **not** veterinarians and their knowledge comes from personal experience rather than professional training. Be sure to discuss any medical advice you receive with your veterinarian **before** following it. Remember, your veterinarian is a trained professional who has actually seen your rabbit! She has both general medical knowledge and information about your rabbit's history and condition that might make it inappropriate — or even dangerous — to follow the advice offered on e-mail lists.

When presenting outside ideas to your veterinarian, remember to do so with the appropriate level of respect for her professional expertise. Know how to ask questions and share suggestions in a way that won't make her feel you are questioning her professional judgment. Remember also that medicine is a rapidly changing field and most veterinarians keep up with new developments in the field. What an e-mail group is discussing as a promising "new" treatment may be "old news" to your veterinarian. Before bombarding her with information, ask what **she** knows about the subject and ask if she would be interested in reading the information you have. If there is a specific article you really want her to read, ask if she has time to read it and share her opinions with you during your next office visit — then, be prepared to listen with an open mind even if her reaction is not what you want to hear.

There are times when you will need to ask your veterinarian to consult with another doctor, but this should be the exception rather than the norm. You should usually feel comfortable trying your veterinarian's approach to treating a problem — if not, start looking for a new veterinarian. If your veterinarian is having trouble diagnosing your rabbit's problem, if your rabbit has an unusual condition, or if the normal treatments don't seem to be working, you should be able to ask your veterinarian to consult with a doctor you know has experience with similar problems or with one of the Rabbit Specialists listed in the *Resources* section. If you do ask your veterinarian to consult, offer to pay for her time and the phone call **in addition to** any fee charged by the other doctor. This is only fair since consult calls can be lengthy and normally take place when long-distance charges are high.

It helps to have a good relationship with the entire staff at your Vet Clinic. Here are some tips to help you be the client everyone wants to help:

- Be on time — or even early — for your appointments. If you can't make an appointment — or know you are running late — call to let the office know.
- Schedule appointments as far in advance as possible. It is a good idea to check on all your family members before leaving for work in the morning. If someone seems "off", call your vet early in the day to discuss the situation and see if you should schedule an appointment. Unless you have a true emergency, don't expect to be able to call when you get home from work and have your rabbit seen that day!

- If you have an appointment scheduled and need to take an additional bunny, call first to see if your veterinarian has time or if you need to reschedule. Don't assume she can see two rabbits in the time allotted for one!
- If you need to speak to your veterinarian by phone, you will probably need to leave a message. If your question is not urgent, clearly state that in the message you leave. Your vet will appreciate this help in prioritizing her messages. True, it may take her longer to return your call, but she will probably also have more time for your question. And if your messages are normally "not urgent", an urgent message from **you** will probably result in a quickly returned call.
- Don't expect your veterinarian to diagnose and prescribe treatment over the phone. Unless you are dealing with a recurring problem, your veterinarian will probably need to examine your rabbit.
- If your rabbit is receiving periodic treatment from a technician (e.g. injections or sub-q fluids) and you have questions or concerns, **schedule an appointment** with the veterinarian herself to address these issues. At the appointment, be organized. Have a written list of the topics you want to cover.
- If you have an emergency and will be at the clinic when they open, leave a message to let them know you are coming in with an emergency. This will help the receptionist know not to schedule anything else new.
- Be patient if you have to wait for an appointment. If your veterinarian is running late, it means she gives **every** animal the time he needs rather than rushing to stay on schedule. Remember also that emergencies happen and you want a veterinarian who will "work you in" if you do have one.

If you have a veterinarian who is wonderful with your rabbit and a staff who cares about you, count your blessings. Take every opportunity to let each person know how much you appreciate them. Always take time to say please and thank you to every staff member who helps you.



Murray at his weekly checkup with Dr. Allan (left). (Photo courtesy of Lakewood Animal Health Center)