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UNHEALTHY MUESLI – TRANSFERRING RABBITS ONTO A HEALTHIER DIET

This factsheet is intended to answer some of the queries you may have about feeding muesli-style foods to rabbits.

Please read it in addition to the RSPCA webpage on [rabbit muesli](#) which includes guidance on how to safely transition your rabbits onto a healthier diet.

If you have any queries or concerns about your rabbits' diet or health, please speak to your [vet](#) for tailored advice.

Answers to the following questions are given on the [rabbit muesli](#) webpage:

- Why are muesli-style foods unhealthy for rabbits?
- What should rabbits eat?
- I feed my rabbits muesli, what should I do?
- How can I make sure my rabbits stay healthy during a diet change?

The answer to the following question is given on the [rabbit feeding tips](#) webpage:

- How can I encourage my rabbits to eat more hay?

What types of commercial food are available for rabbits?

- Pellets and nuggets are 'mono-component diets', where each piece contains the same nutrients.
 - Each piece tends to look the same, but there are some mono-component diets where the pieces are different colours and/or shapes to appeal to owners. Provided each piece contains the same nutrients, these foods can be considered in the same way as other pellets/nuggets.
 - The term '*extruded nuggets*' refers to the production method used. Heat treatment is used to improve starch digestibility and reduce carbohydrate overload of the animal's hindgut. Extruded diets tend to be more palatable and digestible than pellets.
- Muesli/cereal mixes are comprised of different types of food, which look different and contain different nutrients (e.g. flaked maize, peas, pellets, grains, etc).



My rabbits have always eaten muesli, is it too late to change?

- Even if your pets have been fed a muesli based diet all their lives, they will still benefit from being transitioned onto a healthier diet of mostly hay with some leafy greens and a small, measured amount of pellets/nuggets.
- This will improve your rabbits' digestive health in a relatively short period of time.
- Providing constant access to good quality hay allows rabbits to show natural foraging behaviour and keeps them occupied.



Will changing my rabbits' diet improve existing health problems?

- Unfortunately if there are already problems with your rabbits' teeth, changing their diet will not counteract this, but may help to prevent the condition worsening in some cases.
- Once rabbits' teeth begin to curve unnaturally this cannot be rectified through diet alone and may need regular veterinary dental treatment, but changing the diet may still help. The most far reaching improvements will be made by altering the diet when rabbits are young before dental changes occur.
- If a rabbit is reluctant to eat hay (or any other part of his/her diet), take him/her to the vets for a check up to make sure there is not an underlying health problem.
- The digestive health of rabbits can be improved by gradually changing them onto a hay, leafy greens and pellets/nuggets feeding plan.



Will my rabbits get bored eating pellets? Muesli provides variety...

- Muesli often appeals to owners as it looks more attractive than pellets or nuggets (where all the pieces are the same). However, your rabbits don't really mind what their food looks like.
- As rabbits are prey animals they do not look at their food closely when eating it, instead they keep an eye out for any predators that may be around. Therefore the appearance of their food is likely to be less important to them than it is to us.
- Feeding rabbits muesli-style foods can lead to rabbits picking out their favourite bits (called 'selective feeding'), meaning they don't get a healthy, balanced diet. This is another reason why feeding a nugget/pellet type food is recommended, as each piece contains the same nutrients.
- You can provide your rabbits with variety in their diet by making sure they have plenty of hay, grass and leafy greens. Your rabbits must have constant access to good quality hay, and ideally growing grass to graze on. You should also give them an adult-sized handful of safe washed leafy greens each day. Try to feed a variety of greens every day, ideally five to six different types, such as cabbage, kale, broccoli, parsley, dandelions and mint. Always introduce new types of greens gradually and in small amounts to avoid potential stomach upsets.





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Muesli is inexpensive, will it cost me a lot of money to change my rabbits' diet?

- Although muesli-style foods are often cheaper than pellets/nuggets, as many rabbits selectively feed when given muesli you may actually be throwing away quite a lot of uneaten food.
- There are a range of commercial rabbit pellets and nuggets available at differing prices which offer varying nutritional qualities. Your vet can advise which diet is best for your individual rabbits.
- Feeding muesli can lead to dental and digestive problems, which can result in expensive veterinary bills, so feeding the correct diet may actually be more cost-effective in the long-term.

Does this just affect rabbits?

- The [study](#) looked specifically at rabbits' dietary needs. However even though they are different species, the findings have implications for [guinea pigs](#), [chinchillas](#) and [degus](#).
- These species are all herbivores and have similar dental and digestive physiology to rabbits:
 - They all have open rooted teeth that grow continuously throughout their lifetime.
 - They all perform a digestive process called caecotrophy. This is where food is passed through the gut and special droppings, called caecotrophs, are produced. These caecotrophs are an essential part of these species' diet; they are eaten directly from their bottom, allowing the food to be re-ingested.
- All these animals need lots of fibre in their diet (from hay, grass, and leafy greens where appropriate).
- If you own guinea pigs, chinchillas and/or degus, please do speak to your vet about how to provide the best diet for them, and how to safely and slowly transition them onto a healthier diet if required.



Rabbit diet – Muesli Q&A

RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



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USEFUL LINKS:

- Rabbits' welfare needs: www.rspca.org.uk/rabbits
- Rabbits' dietary needs: www.rspca.org.uk/rabbitdiet
- Unhealthy muesli: www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rabbits/diet/muesli
- Rabbit meal planner (diet overview):
www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rabbits/diet/planner
- Rabbit feeding tips (including video):
www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rabbits/diet/tips
- Rabbit diet myths: www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rabbits/diet/myths
- Rabbit health and welfare: www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rabbits/health
- Rabbit Awareness Week – diet advice: www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet
- Rabbit diet study findings: www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet/the-research
- Guinea pigs' dietary needs:
www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rodents/guineapigs/diet
- Chinchillas' dietary needs:
www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rodents/chinchillas/diet
- Degus' welfare needs (factsheet): www.rspca.org.uk/allaboutanimals/pets/rodents
- Find a vet: www.rspca.org.uk/findavet

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