

Burgess™  
SINCE 1790

# Excel



## RABBIT NUTRITION AND ITS IMPACT ON HEALTH AND WELFARE

[WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM](http://WWW.BURGESSPETCARE.COM)

STAMPING OUT  
SELECTIVE FEEDING  
**MUESLI  
FREE**  
Co.

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# ABOUT BURGESS PET CARE

For over 300 years, Burgess has been rooted in farming, milling and animal nutrition. That heritage, combined with modern veterinary and nutritional science, continues to shape everything we do today.

As our understanding of rabbit health has evolved, so too has our approach to feeding. Rabbits have very specific nutritional requirements, particularly when it comes to fibre intake, dental wear and digestive health. Historically, muesli-style diets were common, but research and practical experience have shown that they can encourage selective feeding which can lead to serious health issues.

That's why we challenged the traditional way of feeding rabbits and developed the **Excel 5 Step Feeding Plan**, a simple, science-led approach designed to support dental health, digestive function and overall wellbeing.

At Burgess, our in-house team of vets and nutritionists are committed to improving knowledge and raising standards in rabbit nutrition. This guide brings together key insights from research and practical experience, along with clear recommendations to help you provide the right balance of fibre, nutrients and enrichment for your rabbits.

Good nutrition is the foundation of a healthy, happy life, and with the right feeding plan, rabbits can truly thrive.

Dr Suzanne Moyes  
MVB, MRCVS, MBA



## The <sup>Burgess</sup>Excel feeding plan

92%  
of vets  
recommend  
Excel\*

We have developed our vet recommended\*  
Excel feeding plan to help your rabbits thrive.

FEEDING HAY



EXCEL NUGGETS



NATURE SNACKS



FRESH GREENS



FRESH WATER



The complete diet for rabbits and guinea pigs

\* Annual survey of UK vets

# MUESLI STYLE DIETS ARE UNHEALTHY!

Muesli style concentrate diets are often made up of a mixture of different components, including dried grains, vegetables, fruits and fibre pellets, mixed together loosely and can also be coated in molasses. Muesli mixes encourage unhealthy selective feeding.

## SELECTIVE FEEDING

Selective feeding occurs when rabbits are offered a muesli-style diet and pick out their favourite parts, usually the high-sugar or high-starch components and leave behind the high fibre, vitamin and mineral fortified pellet components. Although the colourful pieces mix may be more appealing to a rabbit owner, the selective feeding of these mixes promotes an unbalanced diet.

Selective feeding increases the risk of dental disease, digestive concerns, fly strike, low water intake, low hay intake, and obesity.



Image credit: RSPCA  
www.rspca.org.uk



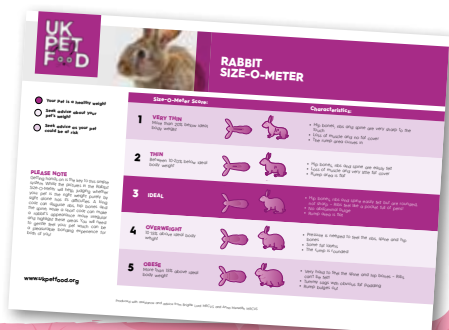
## MUESLI STYLE DIETS INCREASE THE RISK OF OBESITY<sup>1</sup>

Muesli style diets have been shown to increase the risk of obesity. This is thought to be due to muesli diets reducing fibre intake and increasing the intake of easily digestible carbohydrates and fats. Rabbits fed on muesli style diets are also known to be less active which may contribute to the risk of obesity.

Monitor your Rabbit's Body Condition score using this handy Rabbit Size-O-Meter.



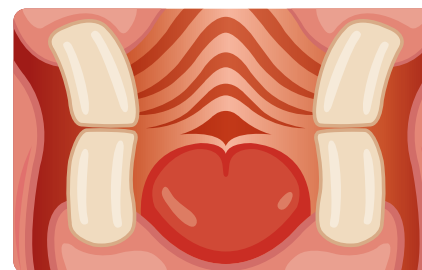
UKPetFood.Org



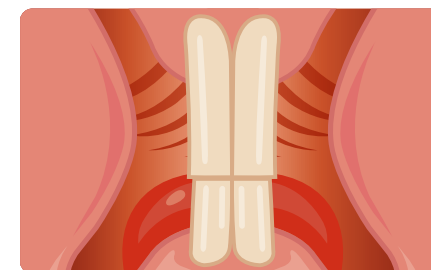
## MUESLI STYLE DIETS INCREASE THE RISK OF DENTAL DISEASE<sup>2</sup>

Muesli-style diets have been shown to increase the risk of dental disease in rabbits. Dental disease is the most common health problem seen in rabbits and can cause significant pain and discomfort. When a rabbit develops dental issues, they may struggle to eat properly, which can lead to serious digestive complications.

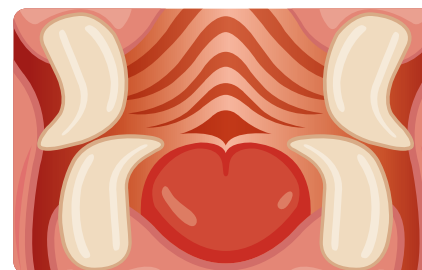
High-quality feeding hay and fresh grass should form the foundation of a rabbit's diet, as they promote dental wear for a rabbit's continuously growing teeth. However, feeding a muesli-style diet may reduce a rabbit's hay intake, leading to inadequate dental wear and a higher likelihood of developing dental disease.



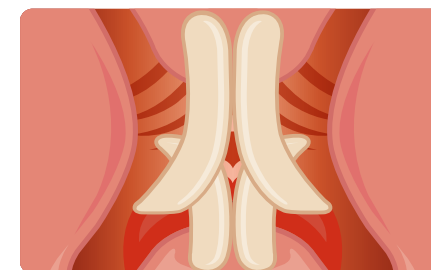
HEALTHY CHEEK TEETH



HEALTHY INCISORS



OVERGROWN CHEEK TEETH



OVERGROWN INCISORS

## MUESLI STYLE DIETS REDUCE WATER INTAKE<sup>3</sup>

Muesli style diets have been proven to reduce water intake, when fed alone and alongside feeding hay. Reduction in water intake increases the risk of urinary tract problems such as sludge, stones, blockages, cystitis, and urine scald. Feeding a balanced diet with the correct proportions of hay, nuggets, fresh greens, and unlimited fresh, clean drinking water will help to maintain water intake.

## MUESLI STYLE DIETS REDUCE HAY INTAKE

Muesli style diets have been proven to reduce the amount of feeding hay a rabbit will consume. Feeding Hay and Fresh Grass should make up around 85-90% of a rabbit's diet and feeding a Muesli Style diet increases the risk of a nutritional imbalance, with rabbits eating more of the muesli and less feeding hay. Reduced hay intake increases the risks of dental disease and serious digestive issues such as gut stasis.

## MUESLI STYLE DIETS INCREASE THE RISK OF FLYSTRIKE

Flystrike occurs when flies lay their eggs in soiled fur, usually around a rabbit's bottom. The eggs quickly hatch into maggots and chew their way into the rabbit's skin. Muesli style diets have been proven to increase the amount of uneaten caecotrophs in rabbits when fed alone or alongside hay. These uneaten caecotrophs can stick to their fur and predispose them to flystrike.



Image courtesy of Woodgreen Pets Charity

## MUESLI STYLE DIETS INCREASE THE RISK OF GUT STASIS

Gut stasis is where the rabbit's digestive system slows down or stops completely. This can result in a build up of gas and toxins, becoming painful and can be fatal. Muesli style diets have been proven to reduce the faecal output and faecal pellet size in rabbits when fed alone or alongside hay, these are both associated with the development of gut stasis.

# MYTHBUSTING MUESLI DIETS

Muesli-style mixes are still commonly fed to rabbits, but research and practical experience show they can lead to serious health issues.

### ✗ MYTH 1

"Muesli is better value for money."

### ✓ THE REALITY:

While muesli may appear cheaper per bag, selective feeding means rabbits often eat only the sweeter, colourful pieces and leave the rest behind. Uneaten food is thrown away, increasing the true cost.

Uniform nuggets ensure every mouthful is nutritionally balanced and reduces waste.

### ✗ MYTH 2

"Rabbits like variety in their bowl."

### ✓ THE REALITY:

Variety in appearance doesn't equal balanced nutrition.

Rabbits naturally select higher sugar, lower fibre components first. This selective feeding can result in diets too high in starch and too low in fibre, increasing the risk of dental and digestive problems. A consistent, fibre-rich diet better supports long-term health. Variety can be given in the form of different forage.

### ✗ MYTH 1

"If they eat it, it must be good for them."

### ✓ THE REALITY:

Rabbits will naturally choose sweeter ingredients over fibrous ones, just as a child might choose chocolate over vegetables. Preference doesn't equal suitability. Rabbits need a diet high in fibre to support dental wear, gut health and overall wellbeing.

## WHY NUGGETS?

Single-component nuggets prevent selective feeding by ensuring every bite contains the same balanced nutrition. When combined with unlimited hay and fresh greens, they form the foundation of a healthy feeding plan.



## SWITCHING FROM MUESLI

Any dietary change should be gradual. Transition from muesli to a hay and nugget-based plan over 14-28 days, slowly reducing muesli while increasing nuggets until fully replaced.



BEFORE



WEEK 1



WEEK 2



WEEK 3



WEEK 4

# HAY: THE FOUNDATION OF A HEALTHY DIET

**85–90% OF A RABBIT'S DIET SHOULD BE HAY OR FRESH GRASS. HAY ISN'T BEDDING, IT'S ESSENTIAL NUTRITION.**

Rabbits are natural grazers, designed to eat little and often throughout the day. A constant supply of good-quality feeding hay and grass supports dental wear, digestive health and natural foraging behaviour. Without enough fibre, rabbits are at risk of dental disease, digestive problems and gut stasis.

## WHY FIBRE MATTERS

### Dental health

Rabbit teeth grow continuously. Chewing fibrous hay helps wear them down naturally.

### Digestive health

Fibre keeps the gut moving properly and supports a healthy digestive system.

### Behavioural health

Rabbits spend much of their time grazing. Unlimited hay allows them to express this natural behaviour and stay mentally stimulated.

## BUILDING A BALANCED RABBIT DIET



# THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HAY

Not all hays are the same and offer different levels of nutritional value for your rabbits. It's really important to understand that bedding hay and feeding hay are not the same.

## GOOD HAY

- Dry and Sweet smelling
- Dust extracted
- Seed heads visible
- Long crunchy stems
- Green in colour



## BAD HAY

- Damp or musty smelling
- Dusty
- No visible seed heads
- Colour maybe more brown or yellow

TABLE 1

## BEDDING HAY v BURGESS EXCEL LONG STEM FEEDING HAY

### BEDDING HAY

- Often cheaply manufactured, can remain packaged for long periods
- Comfortable to sleep on and provides insulation in the winter
- Unknown nutritional value, with no values stated on pack
- Usually less tasty - reduces intake to a level insufficient to support dental and digestive health
- Can be yellow or brown and dusty, and may contain mould spores

### EXCEL LONG STEM FEEDING HAY

- Grown specifically for feeding
- Cutting at full bloom is more expensive, but it is the best time to cut as it results in a lush, green and long hay ideal for foraging and enrichment
- Nutritionally rich and laboratory tested to check nutrient levels
- High in fibre for a healthy gut
- Timothy hay is palatable and is great for chewing to help maintain healthy teeth
- Fresh and fragrant
- Typically low in sugar and high in fibre, which helps to promote good dental health
- Often barn-dried and dust extracted to help maintain respiratory health

# TOP TIPS TO INCREASE HAY INTAKE

TOP TIP  
1

## FEED A TASTIER, BETTER-QUALITY FEEDING HAY

- Choose good quality feeding hay that has been grown specifically for feeding
- Mix a few different types of feeding hay to add variety to their diet and encourage natural foraging behaviours
- A good quality feeding hay will be distinct, you will be able to tell the difference. Good quality feeding hay will be fresh, fragrant and dust extracted

TOP TIP  
2

## ADD FEEDING HAY TO YOUR RABBITS FAVOURITE PLACES

- Rabbits will munch on hay whilst they are toileting, so add hay to their litter tray and toilet area. You can even hang a hay rack above their litter tray to keep their hay clean
- Add feeding hay to different areas of their housing, so wherever your rabbit may rest, they will have the opportunity to eat their hay

TOP TIP  
3

## INCORPORATE HAY INTO THEIR TOYS

- Many rabbits like to play and throw their hay and toys around, adding hay to their toys will encourage them to pull, bite and chew the hay whilst playing



TOP TIP  
4

## MAKE YOUR OWN HAY STUFFED ENRICHMENT TOYS

- Enrichment doesn't need to be expensive, you can utilise things around your home and add in their favourite feeding hay, for example a hay stuffed cardboard box, a paper bag stuffed with hay and forage or a foraging box



TOP TIP  
5

## MIX IN A TASTY GARNISH

- Sprinkle the hay with dried forage, this will encourage natural foraging behaviours and increase hay intake
- Sprinkle your rabbits nuggets through their hay, this will increase movement, foraging behaviours and hay intake, as well as prolonging feeding times and reducing the risk of boredom

TOP TIP  
6

## PROVIDE A BALANCED DIET

- Stop feeding muesli style diet as this has been proven to reduce hay intake
- Follow the Excel 5 step feeding plan to ensure all components of the diet are fed correctly, don't overfeed nuggets or fresh greens as this will reduce hay intake

# RABBIT AWARENESS WEEK

Education is just as important as nutrition and that's why we launched Rabbit Awareness Week in 2006.

RAW is a nationwide welfare campaign designed to help owners better understand rabbits' five welfare needs. Every year, thousands of rabbit owners, vets, retailers and charities come together to share advice, raise awareness and champion better rabbit care.

Throughout the campaign you'll find:

- Free rabbit care guides
- Downloadable education packs
- Posters and social content
- Fun activities for families
- Expert-led welfare advice

And the support doesn't stop when the week ends. Our resources are available all year round, helping owners make informed choices and give their rabbits the happy, healthy lives they deserve.



Scan to explore, download and get involved:



# THE EXCEL FEEDING PLAN

FEEDING HAY



EXCEL NUGGETS



NATURE SNACKS



FRESH GREENS



FRESH WATER



## Step 1 EXCEL FEEDING HAY

**Hay is vital for dental health** (vets say on average 41-60% of rabbits have seen evidence of dental disease)\*. We grow our hay in the heart of Yorkshire where it is barn dried and dust extracted to deliver the sweet smell and green colour which is characteristic of the best quality hay.



## Step 2 EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS



**Nuggets prevent selective feeding** and help maintain digestive health, with prebiotics and an ideal blend of fibre. Research has shown that muesli-style foods lead to selective feeding. This can result in an unbalanced diet.

## Step 3 EXCEL NATURE SNACKS

**Snacks provide additional nourishment** and promote emotional health by encouraging foraging. They're ideal for mixing through Excel Feeding Hay.



## Step 4 & 5 FRESH GREENS & FRESH WATER

Feed a range of fresh greens to add variety. Ensure fresh water is always available.



### DAILY

**Aim to feed 5-6 greens a day.** Mix and match - remember the bulk of the diet should be hay/grass!



### TOXIC

**If you suspect your rabbit has eaten a toxic plant, seek veterinary advice immediately.**

# EXCEL FEEDING HAY & GRASS

Delicious, complementary foods made from fresh Timothy Hay and barn dried grass. Burgess Excel Feeding Hays and Grasses are 100% natural, dust extracted hays that are great sources of beneficial fibre, helping to maintain dental health.

## EXCEL LONG STEM FEEDING HAY

A long stem, sweet smelling feeding Timothy hay that's irresistible and high in fibre (63%). The time of cutting and the drying process helps to maintain the nutritional goodness. Lush, green and long, it encourages chewing, which is essential for dental health and provides emotional enrichment.



## EXCEL LONG STEM WITH MARIGOLD FEEDING HAY

Packed with flavour and fibre, this long-stem Timothy hay with marigold keeps rabbits munching happily while supporting dental health, digestion, and natural foraging instincts.



## EXCEL HEDGEROW HERBS FEEDING HAY

Fresh, fragrant, fibre-rich Meadow hay to keep teeth trim, tummies happy and boredom at bay. This feeding hay is packed with hedgerow herbs, including nettle, to support urinary tract health - perfect daily forage.



## EXCEL FEEDING HAY DRIED FRESH GRASS

A barn dried Timothy grass harvested straight from the field that's naturally high in beneficial fibre (55%).



## EXCEL FEEDING HAY WITH DANDELION & MARIGOLD

A sweet smelling Timothy Hay with Dandelion and Marigold, high in beneficial fibre (63%). Timothy Hay is an excellent source of good quality, long fibre.



## EXCEL HAY BOX

Our hay boxes are suitable for rabbits, guinea pigs & chinchillas and are made with 100% natural ingredients, packaged in a fully recyclable box. Dust has been extracted to help protect your pet's respiratory health, and our hay is high in Beneficial fibre, which aids with digestion. Available in Meadow Hay or Timothy Hay.



# EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS

Delicious complementary foods for rabbits that are high in fibre, rich in nutrients and 100% natural. All our nuggets are fortified with vitamins and minerals for healthy eyes, skin and coats. All of our products contain a prebiotic to help maintain good digestive health.

## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR JUNIOR & DWARF RABBITS

Young and dwarf rabbits have higher metabolic rates than adults, so Excel Junior & Dwarf accounts for this through its higher protein level.



## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR ADULT RABBITS

With four varieties to choose from: Mint, Oregano, Light and Nature's Blend, rabbits can enjoy variety in their diet.



## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR MATURE RABBITS

Our delicious, high fibre Mature Rabbit Nuggets with Cranberry & Thyme supplement your rabbits' diet with vitamins and minerals and prevent selective feeding. Suitable for older rabbits aged 5 years+



## EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS FOR INDOOR RABBITS

Indoor rabbits still need all of the nutrients from their diet that they would find grazing in the wild. That's why our Indoor Rabbit nuggets are specially formulated with vitamin D, dandelion & nettle to support your rabbits' needs.



# EXCEL NATURE SNACKS

Healthy, nutritious snacks that are high in beneficial fibre and promote emotional health and prevent boredom. All our snacks are made with 100% natural ingredients and can be fed daily because they're packed with goodness.

## MEADOW MUNCHIES

Meadow Munchies are made from a tasty blend of dried meadow grasses and flowers that we know your small furries will love. With all natural ingredients, our specially selected, dust extracted hay supports dental, digestive and behavioural health.



## FORAGE FEAST BARS

Our hay bars are high in fibre and perfect for hand feeding. These tasty hay bars are made with natural ingredients and topped with delicious flowers.



## BAKED TREATS

Baked with love our Excel Herby Hearts, Fruity Feasts and Veg Patch Bites are irresistible to rabbits. With no added sugar or artificial colours or flavours, they're naturally healthy too!



## HERB MIXES

Lovingly made, our delicious forage mixes are a healthy treat and are ideal for sprinkling on hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour. Luscious Leaves are made with a tempting mix of dandelion leaves, nettle leaves, red clover and ribwort and our Wildflower Forage are made with a tempting mix of rose, hibiscus, marigold & cornflower.



# EXCEL NATURE SNACKS

## EXCEL FORAGE AND FEAST MINI BALES

Our Excel Forage & Feast Mini Bales are perfect boredom breakers for your rabbits. Available in four tasty options, Cornflower, Rosehip, Marigold and Chamomile. Made with natural ingredients, they are great enrichment to encourage foraging behaviour.



## EXCEL BOTANICAL BLENDS HEDGEROW HERBS

Burgess Excel Botanical Blends Hedgerow Herbs, is a complementary feed for rabbits, guinea pigs and chinchillas. Sprinkle a small handful of Botanical Blends, through Burgess Excel Feeding Hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour and, it comes in a handy tub perfect to reuse for storage of nuggets, hay or more forage! Feed in moderation.



# BURGESS SUPPORTED RESEARCH

The following papers highlighting the risks associated with muesli diets were supported by Burgess Pet Care:

1. Meredith, A. L., Prebble, J. L. & Shaw, D. J. (2014) Bodyweight and body condition score in rabbits on four different feeding regimes. *Journal of Small Animal Practice.*
2. Meredith, A. L., Prebble, J. L. (2014) Food and water intake and selective feeding in rabbits on four feeding regimes. *Journal of Animal Physiology and Animal Nutrition.*
3. Meredith, A. L., Prebble, J. L. & Shaw, D. J. (2015) Impact of diet on incisor growth and attrition and the development of dental disease in pet rabbits. *Journal of Small Animal Practice.*
4. Langford, F. M., Meredith, A. L., Prebble, J. L. & Shaw, D. J (2015) The effect of four different feeding regimes on rabbit behaviour. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science.*
5. Meredith, A. L. & Prebble, J. L. (2017) Impact of diet on faecal output and caecotrophy consumption in rabbits. *Journal of Small Animal Practice.*
6. PDSA Animal Wellbeing PAW Mini Report 2025



# Burgess<sup>™</sup> THE *Excel* FEEDING PLAN

92% OF VETS RECOMMEND EXCEL\*



**FEEDING  
HAY**



**EXCEL  
NUGGETS**



**NATURE  
SNACKS**



**FRESH  
GREENS**



**FRESH  
WATER**

**Big care** for small animals

[www.burgesspetcare.com](http://www.burgesspetcare.com)

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