

Grooming Your Rabbit

Because of their constant shedding, rabbits need to be brushed at least weekly to remove loose hair. You will have to brush daily during heavy sheds. Rabbits will shed in different ways – some will take a couple of weeks or more to lose their old coat, while others will lose theirs all in a few days. Much of the hair can often be removed by gently plucking it out with your fingers. Fine-toothed flea combs made for cats work very well to comb out loose rabbit hair.



Rabbits have thin, sensitive skin, so use gentle strokes when grooming. You can use the soft brushes sold for cats. Rabbits vary in their affinity for grooming – some like it, some don't. Angora and other long-haired rabbits require much more attention than short-haired rabbits. They must be groomed daily to prevent matting of the fur and hairballs.

Grooming provides an excellent opportunity for you to give your rabbit a quick overall checkup. You should check his teeth for misalignment, his eyes and nose for any discharge, and the condition of his fur and skin. Check also for mats and “poopy bottom” (fecal matter stuck to his bottom).

Bald spots on rabbits can occur when they are shedding, but they could also be an indication of mites if your bunny picks at the bald spots or you see dandruff-like flakes when the hair is pulled out. Consult your veterinarian if you are unsure.

Bathing. Rabbits are naturally very clean and do not need baths unless they are incontinent or prone to poopy bottom. If you do need to bathe your bunny, use water only or a gentle rabbit or kitten shampoo. Don't ever immerse your bunny completely in water – bathe only the soiled area. Many bunnies squirm quite a bit, so you might want to have another person assist you. Towel-dry the rabbit and use a hairdryer (set to warm, not hot) if necessary.

Nails. A rabbit's nails can grow to be very long and sharp, and can be uncomfortable for both you and the rabbit. You can clip the nails with a guillotine-type nail clipper, the type made for cats and birds, available from any pet supply store. Wrapping the bunny in a towel may help to calm her and prevent injury from kicking. Try holding the bunny on her back with her head tucked into the crook of your elbow.

If your rabbit has light-colored nails, the quick (the portion of the nail containing blood) is highly visible, making them very easy to trim – just clip the nail right before the quick, but not too close. Dark-colored nails make it much more difficult to see the quick. Try shining a penlight through the nail.

People are often afraid to clip the nails for fear that they will cut the quick and draw blood. If bleeding occurs, it can be stopped by one of the following methods:

- Apply flour to the area by dabbing it on with your fingers and applying pressure. The flour will help clot the blood.
- Apply pressure to the nail with a cotton ball.
- Use a product called Qwik Stop, available at most pet supply stores. (Always have this on hand if you plan to trim your bunny's nails.)

Your veterinarian can also clip your rabbit's nails for you. They should be checked every four to six weeks. Never declaw a rabbit – it is not recommended for rabbits and is also unsafe, inhumane, and totally unnecessary.

This resource was compiled by Liz DiNorma of the House Rabbit Society and rabbit expert Cinnamon Gimness.