

YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND: **RABBIT DIETS** FOODS RABBITS SHOULD NEVER EAT

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Rabbits are eating machines! Thanks to their unique physiology, these remarkable small herbivores must consume a near-constant intake of fiber to keep their specialized digestive tracts running smoothly. Just because rabbits are herbivores, however, doesn't mean they can eat all varieties of greens, veggies, and fruits. Their unique dietary requirements also make many "human treats" (and even some marketed for rabbits) inappropriate as they can lead to serious health concerns if consumed.

The list below outlines the most common foods that should never be fed to rabbits, but it is always best to check with your favorite rabbit-savvy veterinarian before introducing any new food to your rabbit's diet. Similarly, if your rabbit ever ingests one of the items listed below (regardless of quantity), call your veterinarian immediately.

- **Avocados**
- **Chocolate**
- **Fruit seeds/pits**
- **Raw onions, leeks, garlic**
- **Meat, eggs, dairy**
- **Broad beans and kidney beans**
- **Rhubarb**
- **Iceberg lettuce**
- **Mushrooms**
- **House plants**
- **Processed foods (bread, pasta, cookies, crackers, chips, etc.)**
- **Raw potatoes**

Avocados

Though an excellent, healthy snack for humans, avocados contain a compound called persin which can be dangerously toxic to rabbits. This compound is found in all parts of the avocado: skin, pit, leaves, and flesh. If a rabbit consumes toxic levels of persin, it can cause behavioral abnormalities and difficulty breathing, and, if not properly treated, can lead to congestive heart failure (fluid around the heart) which can prove fatal.



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Chocolate

As is the case with many other members of the animal kingdom, chocolate is incredibly toxic to rabbits. This favorite human treat contains theobromine and caffeine, both of which can be very harmful to our furry friends. The darker the chocolate, the higher the risk of toxicity. Signs of chocolate toxicity include diarrhea, restlessness or hyperactivity, trembling, panting, squirming or difficulty getting comfortable, tachycardia (elevated heart rate), and hyperthermia (elevated temperature). Without swift treatment, chocolate toxicity can prove fatal.

Fruit Seeds/Pits

Take care to remove all seeds and pits before offering fruit to your bunny. While feeding small amounts of many fruits' flesh is perfectly safe, the seeds and pits from many fruit varieties contain trace amounts of cyanide. Apples and pears are the most notorious examples, but the pits from apricots, peaches, plums, and mangos also contain cyanide, as do cherry pits. While the amount of cyanide contained in fruit seeds and pits is generally scant, it is best to avoid feeding them to rabbits altogether.

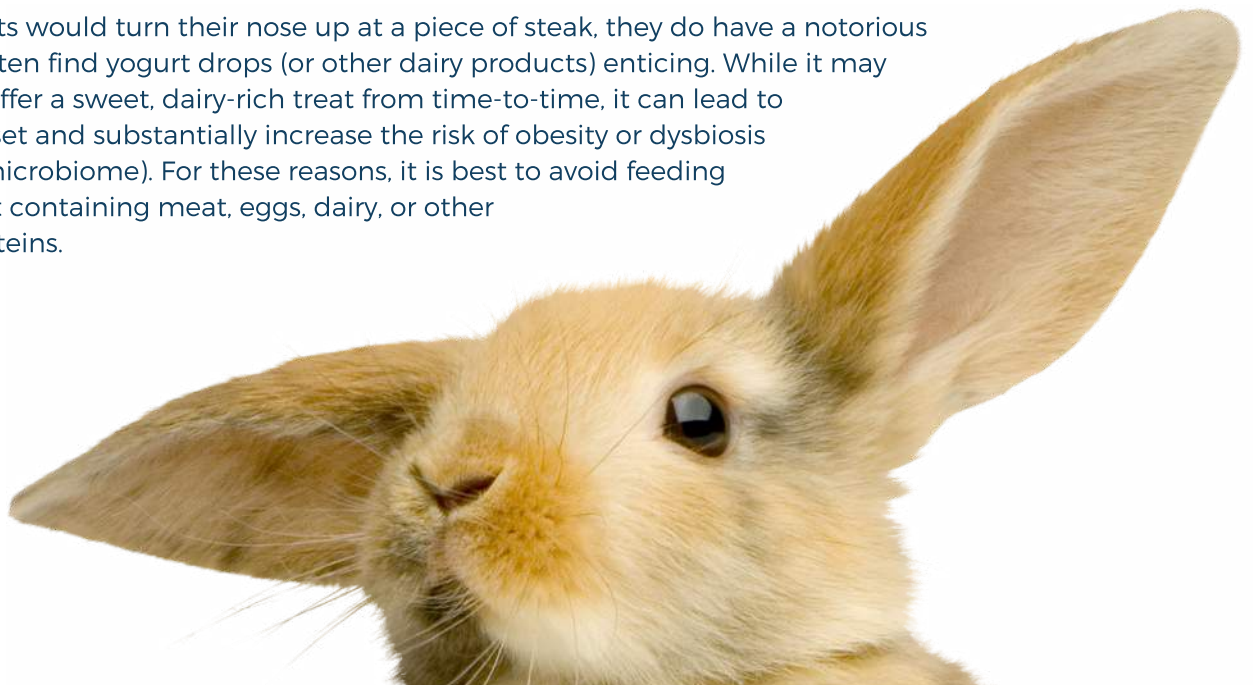
Raw Onions, Leeks, Garlic

Raw allium vegetables, such as onions, leeks, and garlic, contain an oxidant called n-propyl disulfide that likes to attach itself to red blood cells. While humans are relatively unaffected by this oxidant, rabbits are more susceptible to "oxidative damage." As the body tries to rid the blood of the unrecognized oxidant, it will destroy the red blood cells in the process. This leads to a condition called hemolytic anemia which can be fatal if not treated promptly and aggressively. Symptoms of hemolytic anemia include pale gums, ataxia (stumbling), weakness, disinterest in food or water, and lethargy.

Meat, Eggs, Dairy

Though this likely will not come as a surprise, it is worth mentioning that rabbits, as herbivores, should never be offered meat, eggs, or dairy. Unlike carnivores or omnivores, whose digestive systems are designed to properly digest animal protein, rabbits' sensitive gastrointestinal tracts are specifically equipped to break down low-fat, high-fiber vegetation.

Though most rabbits would turn their nose up at a piece of steak, they do have a notorious sweet tooth, and often find yogurt drops (or other dairy products) enticing. While it may seem harmless to offer a sweet, dairy-rich treat from time-to-time, it can lead to gastrointestinal upset and substantially increase the risk of obesity or dysbiosis (disruption of the microbiome). For these reasons, it is best to avoid feeding rabbits any product containing meat, eggs, dairy, or other animal-derived proteins.



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Broad Beans and Kidney Beans

Broad beans (otherwise known as fava beans) and kidney beans are very high in carbohydrates and can throw off your rabbit's delicate gastrointestinal system, resulting in soft stools or diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, bloating, and even disruption of the gastrointestinal GI bacterial flora (Dysbiosis). They also contain a high level of phosphorus and calcium and tend to be quite acidic, making them unsuitable to rabbit's unique nutritional requirements.

Rhubarb

This tart vegetable contains an impressive concentration of a compound called oxalic acid in all parts of the plant. Though oxalic acid is not toxic if consumed in small quantities, if fed in excess, it can interfere with calcium absorption and lead to other unpleasant toxic effects. Rabbits experiencing oxalic acid toxicity can experience a swollen, painful mouth, decreased appetite, bloating and abdominal discomfort, diarrhea, and lethargy.

Iceberg Lettuce

While there are several varieties of dark, leafy lettuces (like romaine and green leaf) that make wonderful staples in a well-balanced rabbit diet, light-colored lettuces, like iceberg, contain a chemical called lactucarium that can be harmful to rabbits if ingested in large quantities. Additionally, iceberg lettuce is anything but nutrient-dense and will add no nutritional value to a rabbit's diet. It's best to be avoided.

Mushrooms

When people think of toxic mushrooms, they often envision the toadstools that mysteriously pop up in their yards overnight. Though these wild mushrooms can certainly be dangerous, even store-bought mushrooms should not be fed to rabbits. Mushrooms can contain a variety of mycotoxins that remain present in the fungi whether raw or cooked and can be harmful to rabbits if ingested in large enough quantities. Effects of mushroom toxicity can include diarrhea, gastrointestinal discomfort, organ damage, and neurological deficits.

Houseplants

When adding a houseplant to the home, it is safest to treat it as though it is toxic to your rabbit. Even if the plant you've purchased is proven safe for rabbits to consume, it is often difficult to determine whether or not it may have been exposed to any chemicals (either directly or indirectly) before you brought it home. As a result, it is generally best to keep all houseplants well-trimmed and out of reach from curious little bunny mouths.



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Processed Foods (Bread, Pasta, Cookies, Crackers, Chips, Etc.)

As humans, some of our favorite foods are convenient, highly processed products that barely resemble the ingredients from which they were made. While it might seem like a wonderful bonding opportunity to share a potato chip or a cracker with your bunny, it is never recommended. Many of the processed foods humans eat are high in carbohydrates and sugar which can lead to digestive upset, abnormal stools, abdominal discomfort, and dysbiosis while also substantially increasing the risk of obesity and obesity-related health concerns. If you want to share a treat with your bunny, try offering a small amount of appropriate fruits or opt for one of Oxbow's many nutritionally appropriate treat options.

Raw Potatoes

Before being cooked, potatoes contain a toxic alkaloid called solanine which can lead to decreased appetite, digestive upset, abdominal pain, and lethargy in rabbits. Even if toxic quantities of solanine are not ingested, potatoes are calorically dense and high in starch, which can throw off a rabbit's delicate gastrointestinal system and lead to serious digestive concerns.

It can be very hard to resist the temptation to share some of your meal with your fur baby, but for their health and well-being, none of the foods listed above should be fed to your rabbit. If there is ever a time you are unsure whether your rabbit may have ingested a food item from this list contact your veterinarian immediately for advice.

