

RABBIT HANDLING & RESTRAINT

Improper handling may cause serious, even life-threatening injuries in rabbits. Fractures and dislocations of the back, resulting in paralysis of both rear legs, are the most common injuries. Sudden acceleration due to fright (startle response) can also injure the back. Rabbits with long nails on the back feet are very susceptible because the nails catch in carpeting, rugs or other surfaces and can overextend the joints. A rabbit's spine is relatively fragile, allowing easy injury if the rabbit struggles violently or kicks with its rear legs while restrained.

Never try to overpower a struggling rabbit. If your rabbit violently resists physical restraint, release it immediately and approach it later when it is calmer. A soft-spoken, relaxed approach usually works well. Cover the rabbit's eyes and stroke it gently to produce a relaxed state. This state renders them less likely to panic.

Never lift a rabbit by the ears or rear legs. If you are concerned about scrapes from the rear claws, wrap a towel around the rabbit to restrain all four feet before lifting. (This method works well to control a rabbit needing medication.)

The preferred method for lifting a rabbit is to slip one arm under the rabbit along the length of the body until the front feet can be held between your fingers. Trap the rabbit's body against your side and lift. The other hand can be laid across the rabbit's scruff (or the scruff gently gripped) to add security to the grip. (The scruff is the loose skin across the shoulders.)

Some rabbits are much calmer if lifted by the same method, but turned around so the rabbit's head tucked into the space between your elbow and body. The supporting arm's hand is wrapped under or around the hips. The free hand is laid across the rabbit's rear, back or scruff. In this way, the rabbit's eyes are covered.