

CHEWING BEHAVIOR

by Holly O'Meara

Why does your rabbit chew things other than her meals? Chewing is a normal, natural, necessary—and highly enjoyable—activity for rabbits. Here is an outline of some considerations to help you understand the why of chewing, as well as the how of preventing destruction of your favorite wicker furniture.

I. Psychological factors

A. Sex. Females often have a stronger urge to burrow than males, although this is not the only reason rabbits chew. The hormone/age factors below also apply to males. Both males and females can and should be spayed or neutered as soon as they are sexually mature (3 1/2 to 6 mos. old).

B. Hormone/age. Is she spayed? If young (under 2 yrs.) & unspayed, spay her. If young & spayed, her chewing will lessen with time. If mature (over 2 yrs.) & unspayed, spay her but get a checkup first. If mature & spayed, her behavior isn't governed by hormones.

C. Personality. Chewers are often intelligent, outgoing & affectionate individuals who like to be in charge and get lots of attention. Does she chew to get attention? Would a companion alleviate boredom? Anything that would entertain her/make her happier might lessen her chewing.

II. Environmental factors

A. Diversions: keep trying to find something harmless she enjoys doing. What kind of "burrow" (such as a cardboard box stuffed with hay), can you provide for her?

B. Protecting the environment: A box or wire basket can go over a group of wires. Browse a large hardware store for products to use for bunnyproofing. You can also try spraying Bitter Apple on non-chewables.

C. Confinement (to a cage or room). This simply buys you time, while you bunny-proof, get her spayed, or wait for her to mature.

Discipline (clapping hands, saying "no") has a small role in stopping chewing behavior. Most people report that it's easy to make their bunnies understand them, but difficult to make them stop the behavior through the use of discipline only, especially if the bunnies are left alone for periods of time.

Since swallowing indigestibles such as carpet presents a health hazard to your bunny, follow up excessive chewing incidents with a petroleum laxative such as Petromalt or Laxatone (sold at pet-supply stores).

Remember: A spayed rabbit will chew less and less as she matures. It may be JUST a matter of riding out a high energy stage of your bunny's life.