

Choosing a healthy rabbit

These gentle pets are so irresistible, you'll be hard-pressed to find a bunny you don't want to bring home. But it's important to take a closer look at their eyes, ears, nose, mouth, fur, and even their bathroom habits to make sure your new pet is in tiptop shape.

Healthy rabbits are alert, active, and curious. Playful and friendly, with bright eyes, a shiny coat, and firm poop—that's the bunny for you! Use these clues to find your perfect match:

Clear eyes and clean ears

Healthy rabbits gaze at the world through bright shiny eyes. Any dry or goopy discharge indicates a health problem.

Also, don't hesitate to hoist those earflaps and peek inside. Whether the rabbit is a fastidious groomer or an advocate for the "natural" look, you'll likely notice a small amount of ear wax—that's normal. But watch out for the three Ds: dandruff, debris, and discharge. These may indicate parasite infestation or infection.

A slick sport coat and a pink proboscis

Healthy rabbits sport clean, soft, full, and shiny coats that are dandruff- and parasite-free. Even though rabbits molt twice a year, a new un-

dercoat quickly grows in. So don't be fooled: Patchy hair loss signals health problems, not middle age.

Don't get your heart set on a particular pet until you get down and inspect those bunny noses. If your potential pal needs a Kleenex, he's probably not a top choice. Another less obvious sign of discharge is wet discolored front feet. Pets with drippy noses transfer this goopy mess to their paws when they groom

Healthy input—and output

Rabbit's eating and elimination habits provide important clues to their daily health. Healthy rabbits should eat enthusiastically and produce plenty of

firm round pellets 'round the clock. Pets who stop producing fecal pellets or experience bouts of diarrhea may be seriously ill, so don't bring them home.

Pearly whites

Watch your potential pet chow down. His upper and lower incisors should look square and meet. He shouldn't drop food when he's chewing, drool excessively, or sport wet matted fur on his chin. What may look like bad table manners are actually signs of malocclusion, a genetic defect that can lead to overgrown teeth and an inability to eat properly.

Sure, choosing the perfect bunny doesn't rank high on your list of life-altering decisions, but don't take this responsibility lightly. After all, you want to help ensure a long life for your new companion.

