

## TICKING HEALTH TIMEBOMB FOR MUESLI MUNCHERS

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- *Two-year study links muesli-style foods to life-threatening dental and digestive problems in rabbits*
- *Welfare charities and industry experts unite during Rabbit Awareness Week to 'stop the clock' and encourage retailers and manufacturers to remove muesli from the pet aisle, with 86% of owners in support*

Rabbit Awareness Week, hopped into action on May 4, and called for muesli-style rabbit food to be removed from supermarket and pet store shelves, following the results of a new academic study that has proved it is dangerous to the health and welfare of Britain's 1.7 million bunnies.

The announcement of the findings from the **two year academic study conducted by The University of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup>**, coincides with [Rabbit Awareness Week](#), an annual event which highlights the health and welfare needs of Britain's third most popular pet. The research confirms the link between muesli-style rabbit foods, fed with or without hay, and potentially deadly dental and digestive problems that lead to costly veterinary treatment and in some cases can be fatal<sup>2</sup>.

**Rabbit Awareness Week is backed by major UK animal welfare charities and pet experts including Burgess Excel, RSPCA, PDSA, Blue Cross, MSD Animal Health, Bayer Animal Health, Practice Plan for Vets, Wood Green The Animals Charity and RWAf (Rabbit Welfare Association & Fund).**

Professor Anna Meredith, who conducted the research at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, The University of Edinburgh, said: *"Vets have suspected for a number of years that feeding muesli-style foods could lead to health issues in rabbits, and now we have the proof."*

This research is welcomed by a number of animal welfare charities including the RSPCA. Rachel Roxburgh, Rabbit Scientific Officer at the charity, commented:

*“Although muesli is healthy for humans, these findings confirm that muesli-style food is not good for rabbits’ health. Feeding rabbits’ muesli-style food can increase the risk of them developing serious teeth and tummy problems, which can cause terrible suffering. The RSPCA, along with all the animal welfare charities supporting RAW, are urging owners to feed their rabbits a diet of mainly hay and/or grass, with some leafy green vegetables/herbs and a small, measured ration of good quality pellets/nuggets daily.”*

A survey of rabbit owners<sup>3</sup> was carried out by the team behind Rabbit Awareness Week to gauge their response to these alarming academic findings. Over half of owners (55%) said they will now remove muesli from their rabbits’ diets to improve their bunnies’ health. In addition, nearly a third (31%) who currently feed a correct diet stated they would help support a move to withdraw this product from sale – that’s a collective 86 per cent in support of the cause!

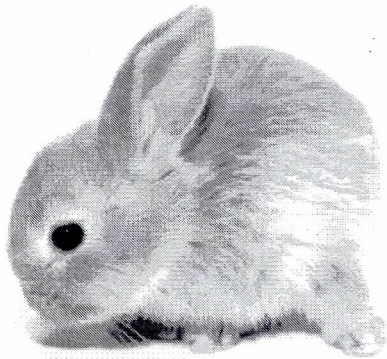
The leading specialist retailers are clearing their shelves of this problem food and manufacturers are now looking to offer advice and healthy alternatives to owners. Burgess Excel, experts in small animal nutrition, is the first rabbit food manufacturer to cease production of muesli.

Paul Miley, Managing Director at Burgess Excel, said: **“Once we saw the results of this new study, as a responsible pet food manufacturer, we ended muesli production for these pets. RAW will provide pet owners with the support and information they need to provide the correct diet and care for their pets and all good stores will have advice about how to safely transition rabbits onto a healthy alternative diet<sup>4</sup>.”**

The survey<sup>3</sup> also found that 71 per cent of rabbit owners are unaware of the correct diet for their pet: a whole 48 per cent of rabbit owners currently feed muesli-style foods, as they have been led to believe it’s the appropriate diet for their rabbits. Further adding to the confusion, many muesli-style products carry the labelling ‘nutritionally complete’, missing the important element of hay in a rabbit’s diet.

A third of rabbit owners (33%) were also unaware their rabbit should visit a vet roughly every six months for preventative check-ups and regular vaccinations. Luckily for Britain’s rabbits, many **vets and rescue centres across the UK are offering FREE HEALTH CHECKS throughout May** in celebration of RAW and to ensure Britain’s bunnies are healthy and happy. Visit [www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/eventlocator](http://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/eventlocator) to find the nearest participating vet practice or rescue centre, together with details of retailers hosting events in support of RAW. The website also houses information about all aspects of rabbit health, welfare and care.

# Say "No" to Muesli



#HappyBunnies #SayNoToMuesli

## ***THE RESEARCH EXPLAINED***

1. The research was conducted by The Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies, The University of Edinburgh, under the Knowledge Transfer Partnership co-funded by B.I.S (Department for Business, Innovations and Skills) and Burgess Pet Care. It was subjected to rigorous controls by the University of Edinburgh Veterinary Ethical Review Committee, and during the trial the rabbits were monitored by a Home Office Inspector and at all points by a vet. The welfare of the rabbits was of paramount importance to all involved in the trial. Further information about the research findings is available on the Rabbit Awareness Week website: [www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet/the-research](http://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet/the-research)

The study is currently under peer review awaiting publication.

1. The key findings from The University of Edinburgh study were as follows. Feeding muesli-style foods, with or without hay, is linked with abnormalities that can lead to painful dental and digestive problems that require veterinary treatment, such as;
  - **Slower gut motility**, which can put rabbits at a **high risk of gut stasis**, a condition which is often fatal as rabbits depend on a constantly moving digestive process which is maintained through a high fibre diet.
  - **Eating less hay, which can lead to abnormal growth of teeth**. This often develops into painful dental disease, or in extreme cases 'roots' so large they penetrate the jaw or eye sockets.
  - **Urinary tract problems**, as eating muesli reduces the animal's water intake.
  - **Dermatitis (inflammation of the skin) and flystrike** as muesli leads to rabbits not eating their caecotrophs – soft moist droppings that they eat directly from their bottom and which are an essential part of their diet. This can in turn lead to flies laying their eggs in the soiled and matted fur under the tail. Maggots hatch out 12-24 hours later and then burrow into the living flesh. This is known as flystrike.
  - an **imbalanced diet** lacking in vital vitamins and minerals, due to selective feeding (rabbits picking their favourite parts of the muesli mix) and not eating all their caecotrophs.

- eating muesli-style foods without hay causes rabbits to become **overweight or obese**

1. Research conducted by Censuswide on 26.04.13 among 200 UK rabbit owners.

### ***WHAT TO DO AS AN OWNER***

1. Most importantly, owners currently feeding their rabbits a muesli-style food should speak to their vet for advice about how to safely transfer their pets onto a hay and nugget/pellet based feeding plan (with leafy greens). This transition must be done very slowly, over a period of between 14-28 days, by gradually reducing the amount of muesli and increasing the proportion of hay and nuggets until they have completely replaced the mix. Good quality hay and/or grass should make up the majority of a rabbit's diet and water and hay/grass should be available at all times.
1. Owners should contact their vet for advice about how to provide the best diet for their pet. Advice for rabbit owners is available on the Rabbit Awareness Week website [www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet](http://www.rabbitawarenessweek.co.uk/diet)
1. Will these findings affect other 'fibrevores' – small animals that require diets high in fibre? Yes. The study's findings also have implications for guinea pigs, chinchillas and degus, as these animals have similar dental and digestive physiology to rabbits. Owners should speak to their vet about how to provide the best diet for their pet, and how to safely transition them onto a healthier diet if required.