



Owning and Caring For Guinea Pigs

Do you believe that good things often come in smaller packages? Not quite ready for the time commitment of a dog? Guinea pigs make great pets: mild-mannered, manageable size, adorable, and cuddly! They're fairly easy to care for, but, they do require some special care, as well as regular veterinary checkups, comfortable housing, and the love and attention from a compassionate owner.

Facts:

- Also called a Cavy
- Lifespan: 4-8 years
- Weight 1.5-2.5 lbs
- Temperature 99 - 103° F
- Heart rate 240-350bpm
- Gestation (pregnancy) about 60-72 days
- They are herbivores
- Teeth never stop growing
- Need Vitamin C in diet

Common Problems:

- Gastrointestinal stasis
- Dental problems
- Hair loss
- Respiratory infections
- Bladder stones/UTI
- Inflamed feet
- Parasites
- Ocular injury/infection
- Heat stroke
- Ear infections

Preventative Care:

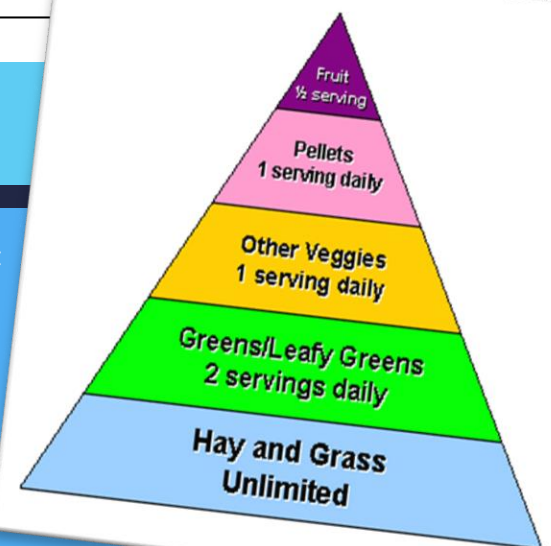
- Complete physical exam every 6-12 months
- Yearly fecal exam to check for parasites
- Spay/Neuter at 4-6 months
- Annual blood work to monitor organ function
- Routine dental exam
- Regular grooming

DIET ESSENTIALS

Pellets: Timothy based hay pellets for adult Guinea Pigs are suggested. Beware, overfeeding pellets leads to obesity and other medical conditions. It should be a pelleted Guinea Pig diet containing supplemental Vitamin C. Do not feed rabbit pellets (they do not contain Vitamin C).

Hay: Fresh hay should be available 24 hours a day. Hay is essential to a cavy's good health, by helping keep the teeth worn down, and providing the roughage he/she needs. You should not feed coarse hay that can injure the soft tissues of the mouth or hay that is moldy or dirty.

Vegetables/Fruits: Introduce new fruit/vegetables one at a time. This way, if a gastrointestinal upset occurs (in the form of diarrhea), you will know which food is the culprit, and thus know not to offer it again. Continue to add new varieties, including both dark leafy vegetables and root vegetables, and serve vegetables of different colors. As a treat (a couple times per week), your pet may enjoy fresh fruit like kiwi, oranges, grapes, strawberries, peaches, apricots, melons, papaya, banana, mango, and raspberries.





Say NO to...

- Beans/lentils/seeds
- Avocado/cherries
- Coconut
- Potatoes/tomatoes
- Onions/garlic
- Rhubarb
- Hot peppers
- Mushrooms
- Iceberg lettuce
- Processed foods or anything previously frozen
- Beets
- Meats and nuts
- Cabbage
- Chocolate/candy
- Dried fruit
- Grains and dairy



Fresh, clean water should be available to your guinea pig around the clock. Guinea pigs drink a lot of water and a dry diet increases the need for water. Each day, change out the water in the dish or water bottle for fresh water. On a weekly basis, sanitize the water dish/bottle with a mild dish detergent and rinse thoroughly.

Supplements

Your guinea pig needs to have vitamin C to be a happy and healthy pet. Not providing this important supplement can be fatal. Luckily there are many supplements available as a liquid or chewable bites or treats. However, if your pet is receiving an ample variety of vegetables, no supplement is necessary.

Behavior

Guinea pigs are very docile creatures; they rarely bite or scratch. They are also social animals and therefore happiest when with other guinea pigs. However, keep in mind it is important to introduce new guinea pigs to each other slowly, and not all of them will always get along well. Don't cage multiple guinea pigs together at your home until you've resolved issues such as disease transmission and verified that the pigs are the same sex, unless your pets are spayed/neutered.

Environment

Find a place for your Guinea Pig's habitat that's secluded from your other family pets, especially cats and dogs, and away from a window (Guinea Pigs do not do well in direct heat, cold or drafts). Your pet's cage should be spot-cleaned daily and have the bedding completely changed out monthly. We recommend a well-ventilated cage made up plastic, metal, or wire, with a solid floor to prevent injuries to feet. A thick layer of bedding such as aspen shavings or recycled newspaper litter is most appropriate. AVOID CEDAR or PINE shavings as they may cause irritation to the respiratory tract. Every habitat should have a nest box, either purchased or one can be made at home out of cardboard. This provides your pet with a sense of safety and security. You may want to purchase a hayrack for hanging leafy greens, hay, and grass to keep it clean and fresh. Some wooden chew toys, sticks, blocks, etc. for your guinea pig to nibble on, play with, and climb over. Provide daily exercise to promote good health and good behavior. You can set up a wire playpen in a safe area of your home (away from outlets and electrical cords) to give your Guinea Pig more exercise and stimulation. Never leave your pet unsupervised outside of the cage. Long-haired Guinea Pigs

should be brushed daily to avoid mats and knots.

Teeth

A cavy's teeth never stop growing; therefore regular dental exams are wise. Even if the front teeth look fine, the back teeth may have severe issues you can't see. Your guinea pig may develop tooth root abscesses and spurs, or points to the teeth that cause painful ulcers inside the mouth. Treatment depends on the severity of the condition. To help prevent dental disease due to malocclusion- limit the intake of pellets, soft fruits or vegetables from the diet. Instead, provide adequate tough fibrous foods such as hay and grasses to encourage normal wear of teeth.

Reproduction

Guinea pigs reach sexual maturity at around 10 weeks of age. Pregnancy in cavy's lasts from about 60-72 days. The average litter size is two to four babies (pups). A pregnant female will display a distended abdomen and increase her food and water intake to double and sometimes even triple her normal amount. Labor lasts about 10-30 minutes with 5-10 minutes between each birth. The mother will clean the pups on her own and the placenta and membranes are eaten by the mother or other guinea pigs in the cage. The pups are born with a full coat of hair, eyes already open, all of their teeth, and the ability to run around immediately. They will rely on their parents for warmth and food until they are weaned at 14-21 days of age. Cavies are not protective of their young, which means you may begin to handle them at a very young age. Unlike other rodents, they rarely eat their young. Female pups must be separated from their father by the time they are 21 days old to prevent further breeding. Male and female guinea pigs may be neutered and spayed at 4-6 months of age.

