

Guinea Pig Care Sheet



Biological Facts

- Guinea pig: *Cavia porcellus*
- Native to grasslands, forests, swamps, and mountains of South America
- Life span: 4 to 8 years
- Weight: 1.65 to 2.65 lb (males tend to be larger than females)
- Sexual maturity: 4 to 6 months of age
- Gestation: 59 to 72 days (shorter for larger litters)
- Average litter size: 3 to 4 offspring; born fully furred with eyes open
- **Unable to naturally produce vitamin C in their bodies and must receive it through diet or supplements**

Behavior

- Docile; rarely bite or scratch
- Easily stressed: when frightened, will run around at high speed
- Highly social; live in small groups in the wild
- Vocalize often, using a variety of squeaks, “wheeks,” purrs, growls, and squeals

Diet

- Large quantity of grass hay, such as timothy, brome, and Bermuda grass (Chewing action prevents teeth from overgrowth, and fiber aids in digestion.)
- Fruits (such as strawberries, honeydew melon, raspberries, kiwi, and oranges) and vegetables (such as turnip greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, kale, parsley, red and green pepper, broccoli, and collard greens) high in vitamin C
- Pelleted guinea pig diet containing vitamin C, approximately 1/8 cup per day
 - Alfalfa-based pellets for reproducing sows (females) and juveniles up to 6 months of age (Alfalfa is high in calcium and protein.)
 - Timothy hay-based pellets for adult guinea pigs
- No diet mixes containing dried fruit, vegetables, grain, or seeds (These items contain sugars and carbohydrates that can disturb the digestive tract.)
- Gradual diet changes to prevent stomach upset
- Fresh water daily

Environment

- Well-ventilated cage made of plastic, metal, or wire, with a solid cage floor to prevent injuries to the legs and feet
 - Place the cage in a quiet location, away from direct sunlight, and maintain a temperature of 65°F to 75°F (18.3°C to 23.9°C)
 - To prevent heat stress, avoid high humidity and temperatures above 80°F (26.7°C)
- Thick layer of fiber bedding such as aspen shavings or recycled newspaper litter

- Avoid cedar or pine shavings, which can irritate the respiratory tract.
- Remove soiled shavings daily
- Nest box made of cardboard to provide a sense of safety and security

Preventive Care

- Complete physical examination every 6 to 12 months
 - Consult a veterinarian with experience treating exotic companion mammals if you have any questions or concerns about your guinea pig's health
- Annual fecal examination for parasites
- Regular toenail trimming, if necessary, and combing/brushing of longhaired breeds
- Regular exercise to prevent obesity

Common Medical Disorders

- Dental problems
- Gastrointestinal stasis
- Hair loss or itching due to mites, lice, fungal infections, or hormonal problems
- Respiratory infections
- Urinary tract problems such as bladder stones