

Guinea Pig/ Cavy Care Sheet

Lifespan: 3-6 years (Captivity)

Length: 20-25cm (Adult)

Weight: 0.7-1.2kg (Adult)

Cage size: Minimum of 70cm L” 50cm H”

Gestation period: 59-72 days (Adult)

Origination:

Behaviour:

Guinea pigs make great pets for children and adults. They are curious, responsive and interactive with the family provided you have gained their trust from a young age. Children should be taught to handle guinea pigs gently supporting the body when picked up.

Supervision of young children is vital. Guinea pigs can be taught to come when called for food rewards and will love to be petted and stroked on your lap. The key to a happy and healthy Guinea pig is the right diet, exercise and housing.

Bedding: Carefresh, critter crumbles, recycled paper, dust free wood shavings – Guinea pigs are sensitive to allergies/ respiratory disease. For this reason Carefresh is a preferred substrate.

What you need to house your Guinea Pig:

- Cage (bigger the better)
- Bedding (carefresh, critter crumbles, dust free wood shavings)
- Cavy origins pellets, Timothy Hay, fruit and vegetables
- Lucerne (under 6 months of age)
- Salt licks, wood chews
- Wormer syrup, Mite & Lice spray, Vitamin drops, Shampoo, Cage cleaner
- Food dish, water bottle
- Plastic house (to nest and keep warm in)
- Cage cover (to cover at night)
- Brush, nail clippers

DIET:

Guinea pigs require a high fibre diet. This can be achieved by feeding 80% fresh Timothy hay, grass and high fibre fruits and vegetables. Feed about the size of your guinea pigs body in hay daily. Hay is important as it keeps guinea pigs constantly growing teeth nice and short and it provides roughage to keep the gastrointestinal tract working effectively. Access to grazing is ideal. Exercise will aid in your pets digestion and prevents obesity. Lucerne hay (a legume not a grass) to guinea pigs under 6 months of age and breeding females as it is high in calcium and protein and low in fibre. The rest of their diet should consist of a good quality pellet (Vetafarm cavy origins) and a small cube of citrus **DAILY** Oranges, mandarins, kiwi fruit or tomato (as guinea pigs cannot make their own vitamin C). 1 cup of vegetables should also be supplied.

Vegetables:

Sprouts, Spinach, Turnip Greens, Swiss chard, Mustard Greens, Broccoli, Escarole, Chicory, Tomatoes, Beet Greens, Bok Choy, Grated Carrots, Collard greens, Corn on the Cob, Endive, Kale, Yams, Yams. Pumpkin and Sweet Potato can also be added however they are better when they are cooked).

Fruits:

Cantaloupe, Apricots eggs (hard boiled or scrambled), yogurt, cottage cheese and peanuts, in small amounts. Other foods that can be included into their diet in small amounts are whole wheat pasta and bread, brown rice and unsweetened cereals as special treats - only give occasionally. Whole nuts in the shell (almonds, brazil nuts, walnuts), Sunflower seeds (high in fat).

WHAT NOT TO FEED:

Salty foods, processed sugar, rhubarb, greasy foods, Mangos, Avocado, chocolate, potato, fruit seeds/pips, dried beans (always cook or fully sprout first), alcohol, caffeine, garlic, onion, tobacco, cabbage, raw potato, asparagus, eggplant, milk, cream, sugar and high fat treats. Avoid digestion problems such as diarrhoea, bloat and gut upsets by slowly introducing new vegetables (small amounts).

Avoid large amounts of very green clover and toxic plants such as oleander, lily of the valley and rhubarb leaves.

Fresh water should be supplied each morning, make sure the dish is well scrubbed to remove slime or faecal matter.

Housing

The larger the cage the better, your rat should be able to run about freely with plenty of space to add toys, bedding and room for exercise. It is important to consider spacing between the bars as you wouldn't want to risk your guinea pig's head getting stuck or them getting out. It is important to give your guinea pig plenty of enrichment toys to prevent boredom. We recommend adding tunnels, rope toys, treat balls, fresh timothy hay inside the enclosure to give them plenty of mental stimulation during the day. A bored Guinea pig can become lonely and depressed, for this reason we normally recommend getting them in pairs (same sex). Keeping in mind the more pigs you have the bigger the enclosure needs to be. Guinea pigs will groom each other, play together and snooze together. Unlike birds keeping them in pairs does not mean they will be less social with their owners. However, Guinea pigs can be kept alone so long as they are given lots of love and kept in an area where they are made feel like part of the family. Keep your furry friends in a draft free and safe area. Cover the enclosure at night (especially during winter) with a towel or blanket to stop drafts and to reduce stress. It is important to clean the cage, (replace bedding-carefresh or critter crumbles/ dust free bedding) and clean all toys and bowls at least once a week, depending of the size of the cage and how many are being housed together. Replace dishes, and toys when worn or damaged. Ensure that there are no habitat parts or toys with lead, zinc or lead-based paints or galvanized parts as these can cause serious medical issues if ingested by your Guinea pig. For this reason it is important that a natural cleaning product be used when cleaning occurs. Be sure to reduce the amount of chemicals used throughout the house (flea bombs, mortein sprays etc) as these fumes can be harmful. Guinea pigs cannot

be housed together with any other pet (Rat, mouse etc) as they can become aggressive if threatened or can be vulnerable to an aggressive rodent.

DENTAL CARE:

Guinea Pigs have continually growing and erupting teeth. They are open-rooted, which means they grow throughout life. Molars are the rearmost teeth in the mouth, used for grinding food prior to swallowing it. As their teeth keep growing it is important to provide them with salt licks and wooden chews to help keep them trim. Feeding long stem hay and fresh vegetables helps with normal occlusal wear and in maintaining normal occlusion.

Recommended toys-

- Natural wood toys (these are particularly great for gnawing the teeth and nails down)
- Lofa shapes (to gnaw on)
- Snugly beds and tunnels (to keep us warm and safe)
- Treat cabob, treat balls (enrichment toys to help reduce boredom)

Treatments

Mite and Lice spray- Your FURRY friend should be treated with mite & lice spray every 3 months as prevention. If you are “treating” for mite and lice they should be treated twice a day for up to 14 days. The enclosure should also be regularly cleaned (remove all bedding every 2 days to remove eggs and larvae of the mite and lice). Keep a close eye on their skin during this time. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

Signs of mite and lice are: Excess scratching, redness and hair loss may occur. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

Wormer: Your rat should be treated with a wormer treatment every 3 months as a preventative as well as a treatment.

Signs of worms: The common signs are weight loss, diarrhoea and loss of appetite. Treat your rat if you notice these symptoms or every 3 months. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

Shampoo: Guinea Pigs can be bathed regularly with a small animal friendly shampoo. Groom them daily (especially long haired pigs) to prevent knots, mats and hairballs. Grooming can also be great for bonding with their owners.

Vitamin drops: Can be added into the water bottle daily for added vitamin support. Very important to add this if your guinea pig does not take to citrus or high vitamin C foods.

Remember to monitor your Guinea pigs health regularly as they can be very good at hiding sickness or disease. Watch out for puffy fur, being inactive, sleeping a lot, not their usual happy self. If signs of illness occur contact your local small animal Vet for advice.

