

Caring For a Guinea Pig



The guinea pig's endearing personality provides delightful companionship for both adults and families. Once settled in their new home they are inquisitive, friendly and talkative. At least one guinea pig friend of the same sex is recommended. With proper care and nutrition guinea pigs can live up to 10 years, though the average is 4-8 years.

General

Most guinea pigs love to be petted once they are on your lap, but are cautious about being picked up. Children must be supervised when holding a guinea pig and taught not to hug it tightly, or allow it to fall or jump. Guinea pigs are easily injured and may nip if not treated kindly. Regular exercise outside the cage is essential and great fun for the whole family!

Housing

Guinea pigs should be kept safe indoors and need as large a cage as possible, with room to exercise. Aquariums are not suitable, due to poor ventilation. Look for a cage with a solid bottom, as wire floors and ramps can injure guinea pigs' feet. Cover the floor with bedding such as Carefresh or Aspen shavings. Avoid pine and cedar, which contain harmful oils, and sawdust. The cage is best in a room where your pets can enjoy your company. Guinea pigs love a house or igloo to rest in.

Diet

A healthy diet is based on quality grass hay, e.g. Timothy, and guinea pig pellets, freely available at all times. Babies under 6 months need alfalfa hay. Look for plain pellets containing vitamin C but without seeds, nuts or colored treats. Also provide a cupful of mixed fresh vegetables and fruit, rich in vitamin C, daily. Parsley, Romaine lettuce, bell peppers and dandelions are good choices, with a piece of carrot occasionally. Remember to supply fresh water in a water bottle daily.

Cleaning

Spot clean soiled areas 2-3 times a week and scrub out the entire cage weekly, as well as food dishes and water bottles. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding the bedding.

Fertility

Male guinea pigs can be sexually mature at three weeks old. Make absolutely sure of your pet's sex and keep males and females separate at all times to prevent unwanted babies. Due to the health risks, breeding pet guinea pigs is **STRONGLY** discouraged.

Health

Find a veterinarian specializing in exotic animals and experienced in treating guinea pigs before you need one. The following signs mean your pet needs **URGENT** veterinary care: not eating or drinking, lethargy, sneezing, wheezing, crusty eyes, fluffed up fur, diarrhea, blood in urine, loss of balance, tilted head, excessive scratching or hair loss.

Warnings

Penicillin-based drugs, commonly prescribed for other pets, are **TOXIC** to guinea pigs. Exercise wheels and balls can cause injury to guinea pigs and should never be used.

More Info

Guinea Pigs: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual, by Katie Behrend
Guinea Pig Care: www.guineapigs.info