

## Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

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### Care of Chinchillas

**Introduction:** Wild chinchillas originated from the Andes Mountains of South America and almost became extinct due to the popularity of pelts made from their coats in the early 1900's. Chinchillas weigh slightly over one pound, with females being slightly larger than males. The normal color is a blue-gray, but variations throughout the color spectrum are bred, with black being the most sought after. Average lifespan for a chinchilla in captivity is 10-12 years, though some can live up to 20.

**Captivity Requirements:** Chinchillas are active, needing lots of space to jump and climb. A cage should be wire mesh with a plastic bottom that is taller than it is wide. The minimum cage dimensions should be 17" x 17" x 24" for each animal. Originating from the Andes Mountains originally, chinchillas do very poorly in heat; temperatures should range from 60-70°F. Chinchillas should not be left unsupervised outside. The cage should be thoroughly cleaned about once a week. Visual security is extremely important, as chinchillas are nocturnal and like to sleep during the day. This can be provided by a wooden hide box. Chinchillas can be housed in pairs or groups, but dominant females can become aggressive. Increasing cage size and the number of hide boxes is the starting point to solve this problem. Males normally do not show aggression towards the young, so breeding pairs can remain paired throughout the year. Chinchillas should be provided with a dust bath to help maintain their fur. Commercial dust, which is a combination of silver sand and Fuller's earth, is available at most pet stores. Offer this daily in a pan deep enough to roll in and then remove to avoid fecal contamination.

**Diet:** The majority of a chinchilla's diet should be grass hay, making up about 70%. The rest of the diet should be a high quality timothy based pellet. We recommend Chinchilla Deluxe pellets, made by Oxbow Pet Products ([www.oxboylhay.com](http://www.oxboylhay.com)). This line of food can be purchased in some pet stores. Fresh fruits, vegetables, seeds, and grains can be given in small quantities as treats several times a week. Growing or lactating animals require additional alfalfa. Avoid rapidly changing the diet. Water should be made available at all times.

**Diseases:** It is always best to check with a qualified veterinarian when there are changes in your chinchilla's behavior or physical condition, if you are unsure of the problem. A chinchilla should also receive a physical examination at least once a year from a qualified veterinarian.