

Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

9330 Waldemar Road Indianapolis, IN 46268

www.exoticvetclinic.com (317) 879-8633



Guinea Pig Care Sheet

Introduction:

Guinea pigs are domestic rodents, whose wild ancestors are still found today in South America. Pet guinea pigs are known for their friendly temperament and suitability as pets. There are several different breeds in a wide variety of colors and coat lengths. Their average life span is 4-6 years. Guinea pigs are born fully haired and able to eat solid food within a few days, although they nurse for 2-3 weeks. Females reach sexual maturity at 2 months, and males at 3 months. Pregnancy averages 68 days, and a typical litter is 2-4 pups.

Diet:

Hay

- Adults guinea pigs should have free access to grass hay (timothy, orchard grass, oat, etc) at all times to promote good dental and GI health.
- Juvenile guinea pigs and guinea pigs that are pregnant or lactating should also be provided with alfalfa hay, which is higher in calories, protein, and calcium.

Pellets

- Juvenile guinea pigs and guinea pigs that are pregnant or lactating should have free access to an alfalfa-based pellet.
- Adult guinea pigs should be fed a timothy-based pellet. Many adult guinea pigs should be fed a limited amount of pellets to encourage hay consumption and prevent obesity. Please consult your veterinarian to determine the appropriate amount of pellets to feed your adult guinea pig.
- All guinea pigs should be fed a plain, hay-based pellet that does not contain added grains, dried fruits, nuts, or seeds, as these items are too high in carbohydrates and fat.

Greens

- Greens are a good source of enrichment and help to maintain good hydration, which is important for urinary health.
- All guinea pigs should be provided with a daily salad that is approximately the size of the guinea pig. We recommend feeding a wide variety of greens – see provided greens handout for suggestions.

Vitamin C

- Like humans, guinea pigs are unable to make Vitamin C and need to get it from their diet.
- Most high quality guinea pig foods are supplemented with Vitamin C, but the vitamin can easily degrade if food is old or not stored appropriately.
- You can increase your guinea pig's Vitamin C consumption by offering bell peppers (especially red, orange, and yellow ones), kale, and parsley. We do not recommend feeding oranges as a source of Vitamin C – they are very high in sugar and actually contain less Vitamin C than a comparable amount of peppers or dark leafy greens.
- We do not recommend providing Vitamin C in the water because this form degrades very quickly when exposed to light.

Treats: **Limit to ½ tablespoon per pig per day**

- Strawberries, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, cranberries
- Apples, kiwi, pineapples, peaches, cherries, pears, mangos, papaya
- Cucumber, carrots, turnips, beets, sweet potatoes
- Avoid commercial treats (e.g. yogurt drops, seed balls), which are high in fat and sugar

Mineral blocks are not necessary for a guinea pig on an appropriate diet.

Captivity Requirements:

- Minimum cage size for one guinea pig is at least 3' x 2'. Larger cages should be provided if multiple guinea pigs are housed together.
- Cages should have a solid bottom, as wire flooring can cause foot problems. Appropriate bedding choices include recycled paper bedding or fleece. Avoid wood shavings, as they contain respiratory/skin irritants and (in some cases) liver toxins.
- Avoid housing pigs in aquariums or other cages with solid sides that impair ventilation.
- Guinea pigs should be protected from extreme temperatures. They can overheat very easily, even at temperatures in the low 80°'s.
- Guinea pigs also like to have a hide box where they can feel secure in the cage. If housing multiple pigs in one cage, each pig should have its own hide box.
- Guinea pigs are social animals and most enjoy having a friend! Not all pigs get along, so always introduce a new animal gradually and under supervision.

Recommended Veterinary Care

- Annual exams (every 6 months for older pigs)
- Spay/neuter in some cases (discuss with your veterinarian)
- Nail trims as needed
- NOTE: A guinea pig that is not eating or producing normal feces for more than 12 hours should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.