



## **GUINEA PIG CARE**

Guinea pigs originate from South America where they are commonly found in the mountains and grasslands of the Andes. There, they were originally domesticated as food animals, but nowadays in the UK are kept as pets. They can be friendly docile pets and can live between 5-7 years if looked after correctly. Their teeth grow continuously through out their life, so they must wear them down by eating hay and grass.

### **ACCOMMODATION**

- Guinea pigs can be housed outside in a hutch with an enclosed run area for exercise, or inside a secure enclosure in the home.
- The hutch should obviously be as large as possible, but at least 100cm long x 50cm wide is recommended, preferably with an attached run to allow the guinea pigs to exercise at will. The run should be 150 x 100cm at minimum, but again as large an area as possible should be provided.
- Ideally the hutch should be placed in a sheltered area away from direct sunlight/rain/wind, and to avoid extremes of temperature. Outdoor hutches should be raised off the ground (approx 20cm). As well as a dry draught-free separate nest area guinea pigs should also have access to a separate exercise area. All hutches must be well ventilated. Drill holes in the back just under the eaves of the hutch roof to encourage airflow but prevent your guinea pig sitting in a draft. This will help prevent pneumonia. Protection from predators is essential.
- Always provide bedding of newspaper/wood shavings (not sawdust) and straw/hay. The amount of bedding provided should be increased in colder weather. Provided your guinea pig has enough bedding it can cope very well with our winter climates so you don't need to cover the front as this will reduce ventilation.
- The hutch should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease.

### **COMPANIONS**

- Guinea pigs are highly social, and are best kept in single sex groups or pairs. They should however, not be housed with rabbits as they are easily bullied and are susceptible to certain diseases which rabbits may carry such as Bordetella (a respiratory infection).
- Male guinea pigs should be castrated if opposite sexes kept together.
- Entire (un-neutered) males may fight.

### **WHAT TO FEED**

- Hay or grass is essential to maintain gastrointestinal & dental health and should make up most of the diet.
- Fresh vegetables and small amounts of fruit (not fruit high in simple sugar) should be fed daily. This is particularly important in guinea pigs as they are unable to produce their own vitamin C, so must obtain it from their diet.

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- Commercial diets are also available and can make up a small part of a guinea pig's diet. However, as guinea pigs can be highly selective feeders, complete pelleted diets are preferable to muesli mixes as they help to ensure that the animal receives a balanced diet. Most commercial diets do contain vitamin C but the content in the diet diminishes over time, so should not be relied on after 90 days from the milling date. Guinea pigs must be fed on guinea pig food.
- Ideally food should be purchased in small bags. These should be used for one month then discarded.
- If there is any doubt about the adequacy of vitamin C content of a diet, a supplement should be added.
- Clean water must be given daily either in a water bottle or bowl.
- Vitamin C tablets can be given by mouth (up to 10 mg daily) or dissolved in the drinking water at the rate of 1g per litre.

#### **SIGNS OF ILL HEALTH**

- As guinea pigs are a prey species they will hide disease, so the first time you see any signs you must act quickly.
- Dental disease – guinea pigs need a high fibre diet as their constantly growing teeth need to be worn down in order to avoid dental problems. If your guinea pig is losing weight, drooling, eating less or passing less faeces than normal, dental disease should be suspected and a thorough dental examination should be carried out (often under general anaesthetic).
- External parasites - Guinea pigs are susceptible to a variety of mites and lice, which will generally cause itching, scratching and hair loss. These may require repeated treatments of topical or injectable medication for both the affected guinea pig and any companions. Fungal infections are also common.
- Respiratory infections - The most common cause of respiratory infections in guinea pigs is a bacteria called *Bordetella bronchiseptica*. Signs of infection include discharges from the eyes or nostrils, sneezing, wheezing or difficulty breathing.
- Bleeding or discharges from anywhere should be assessed by your vet.
- Limping, change in grooming behaviour or wounds should be assessed by your vet.
- If you have any concerns contact your vet as soon as possible.