

Chinchilla

Chinchilla langiera



LIFE SPAN: 15-20 years

AVERAGE SIZE: 400-1000 grams

Females are generally larger than males

PET SUPPLIES PLUS
GREAT PRICES. NO STRAINING.

written by an expert in the pet care industry and approved by a qualified exotic veterinarian

the information on this care sheet is a basic overview and not a substitute for veterinary care. For more information and to find a qualified exotic mammal veterinarian, go to www.AEMV.org

WILD HISTORY: Chinchillas are from the Andes mountains of Chile, Argentina, Bolivia and Peru in South America. They occupy areas that range from sea level all the way up to 16,000 feet. The areas where chinchillas roam are arid and very hot during the daytime hours. Chinchillas are therefore crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk), avoiding the hot day temperatures by staying in cool tunnels and caves. Chinchillas were almost hunted into extinction by people who prized their luxurious coat, which is estimated to be 30 times softer than human hair.

PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS: Chinchillas are round-bodied rodents, which feature extremely soft fur, large back feet, tiny front feet, long brushy tails and large eyes and ears. The density of the fur is due to the fact that each follicle on the chinchilla's skin has at least 60 hairs growing from it. The thick fur protects the chinchilla from the potential cold weather of its habitat. The toes of the chinchilla do not have the claws that are present on most rodent feet, but have rounded nails instead. The ears are large and sensitive and they have extremely well developed hearing. For this reason, chinchillas are often used in laboratory experiments for human hearing studies.

NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION: Chinchillas are very social & engaging - generally very gregarious. Chinchillas are very active & outgoing, but they are not "cuddlers" and don't like to sit still for long. They will tolerate being picked up and held for short periods. Chinchillas need out of cage time to run around, but they are avid chewers, so the room must be "chinchilla proofed". Hide or cover all electrical cords and other cords that you don't want severed. Chinchillas are colonial animals and should not live alone. Preferably keep at least two together; It's easiest to buy them together as siblings, but singletons can be slowly and carefully introduced to each other. Chinchillas can be spayed and neutered. Place your pet's cage in a place in the home where it will be around the family, yet protected from direct light, drafts and excess noise during the day. Chinchillas have excellent hearing, so loud noises and vibrations are very upsetting to them. Also be sure

the cage is high enough to be out of reach of dog noses and small children's hands. Chinchillas are prey animals and can feel threatened by large bodies hovering above them or in their faces.

FEEDING: Herbivores (Vegetarians)

Commercially prepared chinchilla diets are available. Plain pellet diets are best and chinchilla pellets should be 16-20% protein, 2-5% fat and about 15-35% fiber. Diets that include seeds and treats may result in malnutrition and obesity. Offer 2-3 tablespoons of alfalfa-based pellets per adult chinchilla per day; add lib pellets for youngsters. In addition, chinchillas should have as much timothy hay, botanical hays, orchard grass, Bermuda grass, and other hays as they will eat. Treats such as sunflower seeds, no-sugar cereals, dried apples, raisins and other dried fruit can be given in extreme moderation. A few bites can be given two to three times a week. Chinchillas should eat very limited fruits and vegetables. They will give them diarrhea.

**** Please avoid feeding sugary treats such as yogurt drops or honey sticks to your chinchilla. These treats contain far too much sugar and can cause several health issues such as diabetes.**

SUPPLEMENTS: If fed a balanced diet, supplements are not necessary for your chinchilla. However, chinchillas can benefit from calcium and lava chews. These will boost their calcium intake and help wear their teeth down. Salt and/or mineral spoils should not be used.

WATER: Clean, fresh water must always be available and should be changed daily. All water should ideally be free of fluorine, chlorine and heavy metals. We recommend that you use unflavored bottled drinking water or bottled natural spring water. If tap water is used, you should treat it with a water conditioner. If you do not want to chemically de-chlorinate the water, you can leave an open container of tap water out for at least 24 hours with exposure to ultraviolet light. Do not use distilled water, which can cause severe medical problems, since it lacks minerals that are essential to important body functions.

RECOMMENDED SUPPLIES:

- Cage
- Water bottle
- Food bowl
- Hay, pellets
- Bedding
- Hide house
- Running Wheel
- Chew toys

HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT: Many different types of chinchilla cages are available. Chinchillas require a lot of room to run, jump and hide. The more room, the better! A good chinchilla cage should be at LEAST 3' H x 2' W x 2' L, but preferably larger. The cage should be coated wire with bar spacing of about 1" (baby chins will be able to fit through these bars, so you'll need to make some changes to the caging if babies arrive). The cage should have at least a couple levels along with well-placed shelves for jumping and leaping. Chinchillas are often seen by vets for rear leg injuries, which are difficult to fix and can result in amputations. These injuries are often the result of old, badly wired cages or cages with wire mesh floors. **Floors should be solid surface** plastic for easy cleaning and for safety. ALL surfaces, even shelves and the running wheel surface; should be solid. A single square of

marble flooring tile can be placed in the cage for hot days. Your chinchilla will lie on it to stay cool.

****CAGE TEMPS:** Chinchillas are susceptible to heat stroke. Cage temperatures **must** be kept below 75 degrees; higher temperatures can be extremely dangerous, possibly fatal.

HIDE HOUSE: The hide house is extremely important to the chinchilla, and will most likely become your pet's main 'bedroom'. Chinchillas will not often relieve themselves inside the hide house or 'nest', so it is not necessary to disturb the nest to clean it daily. Cleaning of the hide house can be done during the more intensive bi-weekly cleaning. Wood, cardboard or clay pipe can be used (which will cool them in the hot weather) as a hide house. Do not use plastic, as the chin will chew it and possibly ingest it. Each chinchilla in the enclosure should have his or her own hide house.

WATER BOTTLE: A full water bottle must be available at all times, refill it daily. Be sure to clean out the inside of the bottle thoroughly during the more intensive cage cleaning sessions every week. Water bottles will often become slimy inside, which will in turn harbor harmful bacteria. Your pet will most likely chew a bottle inside the cage, so be sure to attach the bottle to the outside of the cage. Check the spout daily for any blockages to make sure your pet always has access to the fresh water. If you cannot place the bottle on the outside of the cage, a metal water bottle guard should be used.

FOOD DISH: Choose a heavy ceramic crock or metal food dish. Do not use plastic bowls.

BEDDING: We recommend an aspen bedding or soft recycled newspaper bedding. Neither of these choices will cause allergic reactions or respiratory distress and it is easy to clean. **DO NOT use cedar chips, as they contain dangerous phenols, which are toxic to your pet.** Corn cob bedding quickly grows dangerous molds and fungus when wet. Also, SOME chinchillas develop an allergy to pine shavings.

TOYS: Several types of toys must be available to your chinchillas. Chewing toys such as wooden toys, including wooden parrot toys, hide houses, wheels, cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes and dried untreated fruit tree branches are all excellent toys for your chinchilla. Chinchillas **MUST** chew constantly in order to wear their teeth down, which grow on a continual basis. Therefore, toys that allow the chin to chew and wear the teeth down are invaluable.

DUST BATHS: Chinchillas love to take dust baths. Dust bath sand is available at the pet store; it is a fine grain sand ideal for small mammals. Pet stores also offer dust bath containers. These containers are generally made of glass or plastic with a roof and small opening in the front to contain the sand while the chinchilla is inside. The dust helps keep oils in the fur controlled and the pet clean. Offer the dust bath to your pet inside his cage at least three times a week, even every day. It should be removed from the cage when the chinchilla is finished. If left inside, the chin will use it as a litter pan, which is unsanitary for a bath! Also, if the bath is made of plastic, the chin will chew on it and possibly ingest the plastic.

HABITAT MAINTENANCE: Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate, cleaning water bowl thoroughly and wiping glass clean. The entire cage should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every month with:

- A mild dishwashing liquid in warm water
- Vinegar & water (1:8) or bleach and warm water (1:32)

- Cage "furniture" should also be scrubbed clean with the same dilution.
- Rinse off all soap and bleach thoroughly with plain water before re-introducing your pet to its enclosure.
- NEVER MIX VINEGAR AND BLEACH - IT CREATES A TOXIC SOLUTION

GROOMING & HYGIENE: Since dust baths are offered, it is not necessary to clean or bathe your chinchilla. Chinchilla fur does not respond to conventional bathing. They are extremely neat and will groom themselves! If it seems as if your pet has not been grooming him or herself, he may be ill. Males should be checked for "fur rings" that might develop on their penis.

SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL: Healthy chinchillas have a rounded, full body and smooth, even fur with no bald patches. The nostrils, under-tail area, under-chin area, ears and eyes should be clear and free of discharge - fur should not be damp or stained in any way. Your pet should have bright eyes; teeth should be even and well aligned with no staining around the chin; breathing should be even and not labored, with no wheezing or gurgling sounds. Healthy chinchillas are very energetic and busy; although they may be caught napping during the day. We recommend physical exams every year with an exotic pet veterinarian. If your vet sees your pet regularly, many common conditions that afflict your pet can be caught and treated early.

SOME COMMON PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE VETERINARY EVALUATION INCLUDE:

HEALTH ISSUE	PHYSICAL SIGNS
Dental disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet chin • Drooling • Reduced/loss of appetite
Hind leg injuries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limping • Refusal to put weight on leg
Traumatic injury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open wounds • Lameness
Pododermatitis (Bumblefoot)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swelling of the feet • Lameness
Gastro-intestinal upset	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lethargy • Loss of appetite • Small, infrequent stools • Grinding teeth • Diarrhea