

# Guinea Pig

*Cavia porcellus*



**LIFE SPAN:** up to 8 years  
**AVERAGE SIZE:** 8-11 inches long

**PET SUPPLIES PLUS**  
GREAT PRICES. NO STRESS.

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](http://www.AEMV.org).

**WILD HISTORY:** Guinea pigs are rodents, whose ancestors are originally from South America. In the wild, they live in colonies that travel through tunnels trampled in tall grasses.

**PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS:** Guinea pigs have full, rounded bodies; short, floppy ears, stubby legs and no tail. There are many colors and breeds, but most fall into three main breeds: English/common (smooth coat, straight hair), Peruvian (long, silky hair) and Abyssinian (rough, wiry hair in whirled and twisted). Guinea pigs have several methods of verbal communication. Purrs, whistles, squeals and chatters are amongst their extensive "vocabulary". Adults will coo at each other and many will squeal when the refrigerator door opens - in hopes of a treat. The chatter (with teeth grinding) is a warning signal; this means piggy is upset.

**NORMAL BEHAVIOR & INTERACTION:** Guinea pigs are social creatures that prefer to live in pairs or groups. It is easiest to buy siblings together at the same time but it is possible to slowly introduce guinea pigs from separate sources to each other. Never mix males and females - as inadvertent breeding is likely, as early as 6 weeks of age! Each Guinea pig has his/her own personality, so there is no guarantee any pair will get along together. Guinea pigs make an excellent pet for a responsible child. They sit well on a lap and usually enjoy being held. However, young children must always be taught how to hold a guinea pig correctly and should never be left unsupervised with a pet.

**FEEDING:** Vegetarians (Herbivores)

A good quality high fiber hay (such as timothy, orchard grass, Bermuda) should be offered daily to all guinea pigs. Young, pregnant and nursing guinea pigs can have some additional alfalfa hay. A commercially prepared timothy hay-based Guinea pig pellet should be offered as to all adult guinea pigs. A quality plain pellet is best. Feed ¼ cup to ½ cup pellets that are 14-18% protein and 25-28% fiber. Diets that include seeds and nuts may result in obesity and malnutrition. Also, grains can upset the delicate balance of bacteria in the

gastro-intestinal tract, causing gas and discomfort. Corn can cause blockages. Alfalfa hay-based pellets may be offered to young, pregnant and nursing guinea-pigs. These contain more protein and calcium but are lower in fiber.

Just like humans, guinea pigs are incapable of manufacturing vitamin C in their own bodies. Therefore, it is imperative that they receive supplemental vitamin C in their daily diet. Most guinea pig pellets contain vitamin C, however, be careful to use the pellet food within 90 days of the manufactured date. Because vitamin C is not very stable in food, Guinea pigs should also receive an additional guinea pig vitamin C supplement daily.

**FRESH FOODS:** Healthy, fresh fruits and vegetables can also be fed to your Guinea pig. Offer these treats in small amounts, as they may cause digestive upset. Broccoli tops, carrots, green beans, sweet peppers, parsley, dandelion greens, apples and pears are good choices. Fresh foods that contain good amounts of vitamin C for your guinea pig are: orange slices, cabbage, kale, sweet peppers and spinach. If you find that your guinea pig develops loose stools or diarrhea, you are probably feeding too much fresh food. If the problem continues after reducing fresh food, see your exotic pet veterinarian.

**\*\* Please avoid feeding sugary treats such as yogurt drops or honey sticks to your guinea pig. These treats contain far too much sugar and can adversely affect your pet.**

**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 about 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
- Vitamin C supplement
- Chew toys

**HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT:** A wire-sided cage measuring at least 40L" x 20W" x 20H" is a good size cage for one or two guinea pigs. Be sure the cage has good ventilation. Glass enclosures should not be used for guinea pigs as they hold in too much heat and humidity. Do not buy a cage with a wire floor; this will result in foot injuries and a condition known as "bumble-foot". Cages should have a solid plastic bottom, for safety and for ease of cleaning.

**CAGE TEMPS:** Guinea pigs have adapted well to our average domestic room temperatures. However, they do not handle higher temperatures and humidity well. Be sure to keep the cage out of direct sunlight and away from vents. If you take your pig outside, remember that it can easily suffer from heat stroke very quickly, which may result in death. Alternatively, it should also not be kept in drafty and chilly areas. Avoid damp areas as well.

**HIDE HOUSE:** The hide house is extremely important. Guinea pigs are very shy creatures with a strong flight instinct. It is very important to supply them with a protected wooden, plastic or cardboard box to hide.

**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 fresh water. If you cannot place the bottle on the outside of the cage, a metal water bottle guard should be used.

**BEDDING:** We recommend an aspen bedding or soft recycled paper/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.** Place enough bedding in the cage so your Guinea pig can happily tunnel underneath it. Spot clean your pet's cage daily by simply removing the soiled portions of bedding.

**TOYS:** Several types of toys should be available for your guinea pig. Chewing toys such as wooden small mammal toys, hide houses, cardboard boxes, paper towel tubes and untreated fruit tree branches are all excellent toys for your pig. Guinea pigs MUST chew constantly in order to wear their teeth down, which grow on a continual basis. Therefore, toys that allow the pig to chew and wear those teeth down are invaluable. Stick to toys bought at the pet store, as these are generally made of pet-safe materials. Pesticide-free, dried fruit tree braches can be offered, such as apple and pear. Also, also wash them well with water and friction before offering them to your pet.

**HABITAT MAINTENANCE:** Daily maintenance should consist of spot cleaning by removing soiled substrate. The entire cage and water bottle should be cleaned thoroughly at least once every week 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:** It is not necessary to bathe your guinea pig. Guinea pigs are extremely neat and will groom themselves! Some of the longer haired pigs might need combing or brushing. If it seems as if your pig has not been grooming, it may be ill. Contact your exotic pet veterinarian. Regular nail trims will be necessary.

**SIGNS OF A HEALTHY ANIMAL:** Healthy guinea pigs have a rounded, full body and smooth, even fur with no bald patches. The nostrils, rump 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 guinea pigs are energetic and alert.

## SOME COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS THAT REQUIRE VETERINARY EVALUATION INCLUDE:

HEALTH ISSUE	PHYSICAL SIGNS
<b>Vitamin C deficiency (Scurvy)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bone and joint problems</li> <li>• Respiratory infections</li> <li>• Sores on feet</li> </ul>
<b>Gastro-intestinal upset (GI Stasis)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lethargy</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Reduced feces</li> <li>• Abdominal distension</li> </ul>
<b>Mites, lice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hair loss</li> <li>• Red skin</li> <li>• Scratching</li> </ul>
<b>Traumatic injury</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open wounds</li> <li>• Lameness</li> </ul>
<b>Abscesses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swellings on face, feet, body</li> </ul>
<b>Dental Problems</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drooling</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Reduced feces</li> </ul>