



THE CENTER FOR

# BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

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## Guinea Pig Basics (*Cavia porcellus*)

**Average Lifespan:** 5-8 years

### Daily Diet

- 1 ½ tablespoons high quality guinea pig pellets (Mazuri, Oxbow).
- Unlimited Timothy hay
- Fresh, clean water should be available at all times

**Treats:** *Limit treats to no more than a ¼ cup in a 24 hour period.*

- Small amounts of green leafy vegetables: kale, cabbage, parsley, spinach, and carrot tops
- Fruits such as apple and orange, should be given sparingly

\*Commercial treats should be totally avoided; *natural* and *healthy* treats are encouraged.

**Vitamin C:** A daily supplement of vitamin C is recommended for guinea pigs.

\*Refer to 'Vitamin C' handout.

### Exercise

Companionship is very important to guinea pigs. Solitary guinea pigs require extra attention to compensate for the absence of other guinea pigs.

Appropriate toys include seesaws, solid-floor ramps, and run-about balls (remove immediately if chewing).

### Housing

Guinea pig cages need to be large enough to provide plenty of room to exercise/play. A minimum of 7.5 square feet (30 inches by 36 inches) for one pig to 13 square feet (30 inches by 76 inches) for four pigs.

Less space than this can lead to overcrowding and stress-related issues or obesity from lack of activity.

Cage walls should be at least 10 inches in height. A solid floor surface is ideal. The cage should also be escape proof.

Guinea pigs are subject to **hyperthermia**, so the cage should be located out of direct sunlight, and be kept at a temperature of 65-79°F.

A 'hide' is important for guinea pigs. They prefer a place where they feel safe and secure. A cardboard box is sufficient. Often pet stores carry specialized guinea pig 'hides'.

Bedding such as recycled paper pellets is recommended. Do not use wood shavings. They are not digestible and many are aromatic and can cause respiratory illnesses.

Food dishes should not be large enough for your pig to climb into. They might use the bowl as a litter box.

### **Schedule of Veterinary Care**

-Annual physical exam; Spaying/Neutering (at 3 months of age or 300g in weight); Nail trims as needed.

### **Common Medical Problem & Symptoms**

- Dental Malocclusion: grinding teeth, lack of appetite, weight loss, diarrhea
- Skin Parasites (fleas, mites, and lice): itching, excessive hair loss, dander ('dandruff')
- Ringworm: patchy hair loss, dry/scaly skin, lesions, itching
- Scorbutus (Scurvy): sore joints, decreased appetite, lethargy (See 'Guinea Pigs & Vitamin C' handout)
- Diarrhea: sudden diet change or low fiber diet may cause persistent loose stools  
\*Introduce new foods slowly and follow diet recommendations listed above
- Lymphoma: enlarged lymph nodes, diarrhea, decreased appetite, difficulty walking
- Heat Stroke: panting, lethargy/weakness
- Bordetella: nasal discharge, sneezing, inappetance (weight loss), depression