

Guinea Pig General Care and Husbandry

Diet

- Guinea pigs should primarily eat timothy hay based pellets (~1/8 cup per day) as well as fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Always introduce new foods slowly to avoid digestive upsets such as diarrhea.
- Offer unlimited timothy hay.
- It is recommended to offer ~ ½ cup vegetables and ~1-2 tablespoons of fruit per day. If your guinea pig is overweight, exclude fruit from the diet as it is high in sugar. Guinea pigs have a sweet tooth and may eat the foods that are high in sugars instead of the beneficial greens.



Please refer to the HSCC food chart for a comprehensive list of fruits and veggies

Housing/Equipment

- Guinea pigs need as much floor space as possible. They are not natural climbers and housing with levels can result in falls leading to possible injuries.
- Cages with solid floors (vs. wire floors) are best to prevent foot sores (also known as Bumble Foot) as well as potential injuries.
- A hay canister is a good way to offer unlimited access to hay without a mess.
- Be sure to provide a hiding house so your friend has a place to hide and feel safe.
- Stopped water bottles are the best option to provide access to fresh, clean water. Be sure to change the water daily, and check to make sure it is not leaking.
- Ceramic food bowls are highly recommended to avoid spillage and chewing.
- Guinea pigs are not easily litter box trained, so it is important to clean the cage daily. Some good options for bedding are “Care Fresh” bedding, aspen shavings, fleece blankets, and newspaper.
- **AVOID** cedar and pine shavings because they are aromatic and can cause respiratory problems.

Handling/enrichment

- Guinea pigs can be easily startled, so always let your guinea pig know you are there by speaking to them or letting them sniff your hand. To pick up your guinea pig, use one hand to support his/her chest and the other to support the hind end. Once you have picked him/her up, support him/her against your chest. Guinea pigs like to feel supported.
- Guinea pigs are active and enjoy playing with toys for enrichment. Some good items for play/enrichment include: cardboard tubes (toilet paper, paper towel) filled with hay, gnawing sticks, hanging wooden toys/huts, and bells.

- Guinea pigs' teeth grow continuously so it is very important to provide something for them to chew on in order to prevent the teeth from over-growing. Twigs from fruit trees are a good option but AVOID cherry.
- **DO NOT** use exercise wheels or exercise balls! Guinea pigs are not very agile and can easily injure themselves.

Health

- Guinea pigs need to have their nails trimmed about every 4-5 weeks. Nail clippers designed for cats are ok to use. Ask your veterinarian for a demonstration if you are unsure.
- Guinea pigs ONLY need bathing should the following be a concern/issue:
Lice/external parasites
Soiled from urine/feces
Fungal infections
- Guinea pigs do need to be brushed. The frequency depends on the length of their hair.
- Remember that a guinea pig's teeth grow continuously and need to be worn down by chewing. Check them regularly to ensure they look normal and healthy.
- Guinea pigs can suffer from several health issues such as: bloat, diarrhea, bladder stones (from a diet too high in calcium), ear infections, external parasites, upper respiratory infections, as well as a variety of dental issues. If your guinea pig seems unwell, always be sure to check with your veterinarian.

Introducing Guinea Pigs

- Guinea pigs are very social animals and do best in pairs. Female pairs are a good option as well as pairs of neutered males with females. Male-male pairs can often lead to some aggressive behaviors.
- Guinea pigs are very vocal and communicate using a wide variety of vocalizations and body movements. Some examples of what these different noises mean are as follows:
 - "Wheeking" = excitement! This is one of the most common vocalizations.
 - Purring = contentment
 - Rumbling sounds like a motorboat and is a whole body movement (also known as rumble strutting) = tension/stress
 - Teeth chattering = agitation, stress, aggression, or hunger
 - Hissing = agitation
- Be sure to watch your guinea pig's body language closely during the introductions. Signs to watch for that may indicate a fight or tension include but are not limited to: rumble strutting/motor boat sound, loud shrieking/squealing, teeth chattering, mounting, biting. Always have a towel on hand so if a fight breaks out you can safely intervene.

References:

- <http://www.mgpr.org>
- <http://guineapigdiet.net/guinea-pig-care.html>
- <http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/guinea-pig-care.aspx>