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# **How to care for your Guinea Pig**

## **Guinea Pig Nutrition**

Feeding is perhaps the single most important factor in maintaining a healthy guinea pig. Your guinea pig is a herbivore, which means they eat only plant material and typically graze 6-8 hours per day. Herbivores need to have food constantly moving through their digestive systems to avoid health problems. A diet of mostly meadow hay (at least 75%) provides the fibre necessary to do this. The rest of your guinea pig's diet should consist of high quality, dry food, vegetables and a small amount of select treats.

Fresh water needs to be provided 24 hours a day. Available options include: a water bottles that hangs on the side of the cage (it is a good idea to have two inside the cage in case one gets blocked) or a ceramic bowl that can't be tipped over. guinea pigs are very prone to heat stress (temperatures above 28°C). It is recommended to keep them inside or in the shade outside and provide frozen water bottles to cuddle up to on hot days (guinea pigs can't sweat). A salt lick is equally important in hot weather because they drink more water which can disrupt their salt balance. By having a salt lick available your guinea pig can regulate salt intake according to their needs. Salt licks should be replaced every 3 months if not eaten already.

### **Hay**

Meadow hay is vital to the digestive health of your guinea pig. It is a mixture of grasses which is similar to what they would normally eat in the wild. Expect the colour and consistency to change from one batch to another. Feeding the right amount of meadow hay prevents obesity, dental disease, diarrhoea and boredom. Your guinea pig should have unlimited access to meadow hay to graze on all day. Unless the hay in your pet's habitat is soiled, do not replace it. Replacing it could encourage picky eating! This is not to be confused with straw (yellow, made from wheat stalks) which is used for bedding.

Lucerne (aka alfalfa) is a legume and not a proper grass hay designed for them to graze on all day. Lucerne is high in protein and calcium which is beneficial supplement to a young guinea pigs diet in addition to meadow hay. Lucerne may also be beneficial to

guinea pigs who are pregnant/nursing, or recovering from illness that have higher nutritional requirements. After one year, gradually wean your guinea pig off Lucerne hay and only give lucerne as a treat every now and then. guinea pigs fed too much lucerne as an adult can become overweight and have a higher chance of developing bladder stones.

### **Pellets**

A small amount of complete, fortified pellets helps you make sure your pet is getting all the vitamins and minerals required for a healthy diet. Please note that guinea pigs should never be fed solely on pellets.

### **Treats**

Treats are a great way to bond with your guinea pig. You love giving treats and they love eating them! Offering too many treats can encourage your pet to refuse basic foods and rob them of nutrition. As a guide only offer 1 – 2 table spoons of treats a day. Popular treats to give your guinea pig are: Nibble-O's, Rudducks Tropical mix, and various fruits.

### **Vegetables and Herbs**

Vegetables provide an abundance of health boosting benefits. As with most things, variety is the spice of life. As a guide, feed around ½ a packed cup of mixed vegetables per kilogram of body weight per day. Over feeding of vegetables may result in your guinea pig eating less hay which is not ideal.

Some examples of suitable vegetables include:

Broccoli, cabbage, celery, endive, carrot tops, brussel sprouts, spinach leaves, bok choy, other Asian greens, dark leafed lettuce varieties, parsley, dandelion, coriander, basil, dill, mint etc.

### **Foods to Avoid**

Onions or anything that comes from a bulb, lawn mower clippings, rhubarb, nuts, breads, biscuits, sweets, sugar, breakfast cereals, grapes, watery fruits and vegetables (watermelon, iceberg lettuce etc), chocolate or any kind of dairy.

\*This is not an complete list. If in doubt don't feed to your guinea pig.

## **Guinea Pig Health**

### **Vitamin C**

The most essential vitamin to a guinea pigs health is vitamin C. Many animals bodies can make their own vitamin C if there is not enough in their diet. Guinea pigs and humans are some of the only species that rely solely on their diet to provide enough vitamin C to ward off illness. If guinea pigs do not get enough vitamin C every day they can develop scurvy (like sailors used to) among other things. The best way to provide vitamin C is by supplying them with lots of fresh vegetables. Vitamin C supplements are also available to ensure your guinea pig is getting enough vitamin C. Vetafarm Vita C plus comes in pre-measured tablets which dissolve in your guinea pigs water.

### **Mites and Lice**

guinea pigs can be affected by mites and lice even if kept indoors. It is much easier to prevent than to treat once affected. We recommend spraying the guinea pig and the hutch with Rudducks Mite & Lice Spray fortnightly. Be sure to remove any food an water from the hutch beforehand.

## **Worm Prevention**

Intestinal worms can cause digestive disturbances and make your guinea pig feel uncomfortable. Prevent worms by dosing their drinking water for 2 consecutive days with Rudducks Worm Syrup every 3 months.

## **Dental Health**

Guinea pigs' teeth are continuously growing so many different approaches can be used to prevent them from overgrowing. Other than providing hay for grazing, offer them hard wooden chews (guinea pig safe only), mineral blocks, lucerne cubes, and treat bars to gnaw on.

## **Grooming**

Guinea pigs will occasionally need their nails trimmed. This must be done with special claw clippers as human ones can splinter the nail. Do not attempt to clip your guinea pig's nails if you are unsure how to do it properly. Our friendly staff will demonstrate the correct technique.

To keep your guinea pig's coat in top condition, groom at least twice weekly. The most suitable brush will vary depending on your guinea pig's coat type. A good brush for most short coats is the 'zoom groom' (cat version). The Zoom-groom picks up loose hair, massages the muscle, and stimulates the skin's oil glands for a fantastically shiny coat. Most guinea pigs do not need to be washed very frequently. They do a good job of keeping themselves clean and bathing can be quite stressful for everyone involved. Longer haired guinea pigs may need more frequent bathing. Only use a guinea pig suitable shampoo such as Rudducks Cute 'n' Clean. Place a rubber mat at the bottom of the tub to prevent your guinea pig from slipping. Guinea pigs can swim, but it is don't fill the bath water past their head and never leave them unattended while in water. Avoid getting the head wet; if it needs cleaning, use a damp face cloth. Gently place cotton balls in your guinea pig's ears to stop any water from getting in and causing problems.

When finished, wrap your guinea pig up in a towel and take the time to towel and blow dry them in a box on the 'warm' setting. Be sure that your guinea pig is completely dry before returning to an outdoor hutch and keep inside for a couple of hours if cold outside. Remember to give your guinea pig their favourite treat after the bath!

## **Guinea Pig Housing**

It is recommended that guinea pigs are kept as indoor pets. However, your guinea pigs will want a place to call their own. Choose a large cage with a solid floor that is well ventilated and with plenty of room to run around. Place your guinea pig's home near household activities, but away from drafts. Remove soiled bedding daily and totally clean the hutch at least once weekly with a guinea pig safe cleaner such as Rudducks Hutch Clean. Do not use household cleaners for your guinea pig hutch because it can cause irritation to their sensitive airways.

All pet guinea pigs should be given the opportunity to roam around outside of their hutch each day. If inside, check cords and make sure outlets are covered. Place plants out of reach, because some can be poisonous. To be on the safe side you can spray things in your house with a bitter tasting chewing deterrent. Be prepared for your guinea pig to chew on just about anything, including curtains, carpets and furniture.

Unless your house or backyard is very guinea pig proof, it is recommended to use an exercise pen or a guinea pig harness and lead to ensure safe play time.

Providing your guinea pig with 'play time' promotes good physical & mental health. Recommended toys include: Treat balls, Kongs, play tunnels, veggie patch chew toys and veggie baskets. Try hiding treat items amongst the toy or hay for a fun game of hide and seek.

A 'safe' hiding place should be provided for your guinea pig at all times. A frightened guinea pig will 'bolt' into their hiding hole if they feel threatened. Guinea pig houses can be purchased in many different shapes and sizes. By providing these 'bolt holes', guinea pigs may feel more secure in their environment. More security = less stress = healthier guinea pig!

Straw is an excellent form of bedding as it is more resistant to moisture than paper, insulating and provides some digging activity for your guinea pig. In winter time extra bedding is needed so they can burrow in and stay warm.

If kept outdoors ensure that the hutch is rain and predator proof. Avoid extreme weather conditions as guinea pigs can succumb to heat stroke very easily in hot weather. Hutches need to be well ventilated.

## **Guinea Pig Behaviour**

Some guinea pig behaviours can seem rather strange. Guinea pigs often leap up into the air and this is known as 'pop corning'. This means they are happy.

Guinea pigs also make a wide range of noises to communicate how they are feeling. The most commonly known sound is "weeking", which usually means they are excited. Guinea pigs can also make a purring noise. Depending on the pitch of the purr gives two different meanings. When they are enjoying themselves (usually while being petted) the purr is quite low and the guinea pig will look relaxed. If the purr is more high pitched (especially towards the end) means that your guinea pig is becoming annoyed. If they are making a chattering noise with their teeth then it is best to put the guinea pig back in their hutch to calm down. There is also a noise that is rarely heard by guinea pig owners called "chirping" which sounds like a bird twittering. It is still unknown what this sound means.

It is not advisable to permanently mix guinea pigs with rabbits as they may bully each other. Guinea pigs are sociable animals so housing them with other guinea pigs is encouraged. Neutered guinea pigs of opposite or same sexes can be housed together. Any attempted introductions should be monitored closely.

# New Guinea Pig Check List

## Housing

- ❑ **Hutch** – Keep you guinea pig safe and secure
- ❑ **House/hiding hole** – Provides a safe 'burrow'
- ❑ **Straw/Bedding** – Comfy sleeping material
- ❑ **Hutch Clean** – Safe odour controller and disinfectant
- ❑ **Litter** – guinea pig safe and absorbent

## Feeding

- ❑ **Pellets** – Quality pellets provide extra nutritional value
- ❑ **Hay** - Meadow, Lucerne, Oaten or Timothy Hay for digestion
- ❑ **Food Bowl** – Heavy and chew proof
- ❑ **Water Bottles** – Keeps water clean
- ❑ **Vitamin C & Multivitamin Supplement** – Make sure your guinea pig is getting all the nutrients they require
- ❑ **Treats** – encourage good behaviours with treats

## Health

- ❑ **Mite & Lice spray** -Spray once a fortnight
- ❑ **Worm syrup** – Once every 3 months
- ❑ **Salt Lick** – For self regulating salt levels
- ❑ **Mineral Stone** – Supplies extra minerals
- ❑ **Wood Chews** – Provides good chewing habits for dental health

## Grooming

- ❑ **Brush** – To remove excess hair and encourage healthy hair
- ❑ **Nail Clipper** – Trim excess nail length when needed
- ❑ **Shampoo** – Gentle and guinea pig safe

## Exercise & Behaviour

- ❑ **Toys** – Chew toys, Tunnels, Treat balls etc
- ❑ **Bitter Chew deterrent sprays** – Protect your hutch, power cords and other house hold items.
- ❑ **guinea pig harness and lead** – A fun way to exercise your guinea pig
- ❑ **Exercise Pen** – A safe area for your guinea pig's play time
- ❑ **Carry crate** – For transporting your guinea pig safely

*We hope you enjoy your new addition to the family. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about caring for your new pet. Nothing is more important to us than insuring that you and your pet have a happy life together.*