



## Guinea Pig Care

Guinea pigs make great pets. As with all animals, their temperaments are variable and you should choose one that is relaxed when handled.

Guinea pig's teeth grow continuously. This means that if they have upper and lower jaws that do not align properly then the teeth do not grind against each other and become overgrown. To aid in the maintenance of healthy teeth guinea pigs should be given wood to chew on and have access to dirt. This can be achieved by feeding grass with the dirt and roots still attached or by letting your guinea pig graze on grass or by sprinkling washed sand on top of their dry food.

Wood can be provided in the form of blocks purchased from the pet shop or from branches of fruit trees.

## Handling

Guinea pigs are docile animals that are relatively easy to handle.

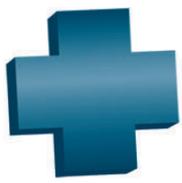
Children should always be supervised when playing with a guinea pig. When children hold a guinea pig they should be sitting on the ground with the guinea pig in their lap this way the guinea pig does not have very far to fall if it struggles and the child lets go. If a guinea pig is dropped from any height it may suffer serious injuries such as broken legs or internal damage.

## Feeding

Guinea pigs have a digestive system that is able to cope with large amounts of dietary fibre. In the wild they eat a wide range of plants, with a preference for tender succulent plant parts as well as coarse roughage. The roughage (hay or straw) stimulates gut motility and supports the microorganisms in the gut ('hind gut fermentation') that assist in the digestive process. Guinea pigs eat a huge amount of food for their size and produce lots of stools.

In recent years it has been a trend for guinea pig dry foods to contain molasses. This is of great concern as guinea pigs gain most of their nutrients through hind gut fermentation of complex carbohydrates and fibre. The feeding of molasses, a sugar compound not normally available to these animals may in some circumstances encourage the overgrowth of clostridial bacteria to occur. These bacteria produce toxins that can result in death of the guinea pig. Guinea pigs on molasses containing diets are most vulnerable to clostridial toxicity during periods of stress.

In our experience stresses that may induce this toxicity include pregnancy, hot weather, surgical recovery, illness and injury. Therefore rations containing molasses are not a suitable diet for



guinea pigs and should not be fed. Read the label carefully before making a purchase to make sure the mix is free of molasses, sugar and dried fruit.

Guinea pigs should have access to hay at all times. In addition they should have other dry foods such guinea pig pellets, bran, chaff, lucerne hay and straw. Bran is especially good for the older guinea pig that is losing weight. Guinea pigs should also be fed grass and/or leafy vegetables (e.g. lettuce, spinach, cabbage, celery, the outer leaves of corn, cauliflower leaves etc). Greens are especially important for guinea pigs as they supply them with Vitamin C. Guinea pigs must have a dietary source of Vitamin C or they will become sick and die of Vitamin C deficiency. Other vegetables like carrots, tomatoes, capsicum, broccoli, corn cobs etc can be fed in small amounts. Potatoes and pumpkin should be avoided. Fresh fruit (not dried) can be given in small amounts. Fruit or vegetables that have not been eaten from the previous feed should be removed from the cage at the next feed time.

Guinea pigs obtain most of their water through leafy greens so you may notice that your guinea pig does not drink very much. However they should have access to fresh water at all times.

It is very important to store the food in a cool dry place in a rodent proof container. Mouldy or sour food should never be fed as the toxins in the mould can be fatal to the guinea pig

## Caging

Guinea pigs are social animals that seek close contact with their cage mates and will stand side by side when resting and feeding. However male guinea pigs may fight even if they have been raised together and castration should be performed if males are fighting.

Most females are happy to share their space with another female. Female guinea pigs are not generally desexed and if fighting between girls occurs they will need to be separated. Guinea pigs can be kept alone as long as their social needs are being met by you. Guinea pigs are vocal creatures and have a range of calls such as the chatter, whine, tweet, whistle, purr, drr, scream, squeal and chirp. They recognise their owners and will emit excited squeals when feeding is imminent.

Guinea Pigs can be kept indoors or outdoors. They need protection from predators such as dogs, cats, birds of prey and foxes. They also need refuge from rats and mice.

We recommend outdoor housing in a sheltered weatherproof spot close to the house. It must have a solid insulated sleeping area with bedding such as straw or hay. We do not recommend material for bedding because it will become soiled with urine and faeces very quickly.

Guinea pigs do not tolerate direct sun for any length of time during the summer months. They



are better adapted to cold weather than to hot and as they are unable to sweat or pant they are very susceptible to heat stress. In summer, when the ambient temperature is 30° C or higher, they may need to be brought inside.

Guinea pigs do not dig burrows.

## Diseases

Guinea pigs should have an Annual Health Examination to check their teeth, eyes, ears, feet, coat, and weight, to ensure they are in optimal health.

The most common problem in guinea pigs is mites. These parasites cause irritation and itchiness in the guinea pigs skin. The guinea pig scratches itself and large scabs form. The broken skin can become infected with bacteria and make the guinea pig very sick. If your guinea pig is itchy then it should be brought into the clinic for an examination and treatment.

Over growth of the nails is common in guinea pigs and they should be kept trimmed.

Slobbering and weight loss can occur in guinea pigs as a result of overgrown teeth. If your guinea pig is showing these symptoms it should be brought into the clinic for examination.

## Enjoy your Guinea Pig!

**Guinea Pigs make great pets and we hope you enjoy yours!**