

# Pet Care Advice

## Caring for your Guinea Pig

### Feeding

Feeding the correct diet is very important. Muesli-based diets should be avoided as these encourage selective feeding which is similar to a human being eating junk food all the time. It can cause severe tooth problems. The best guinea pig foods are pelleted diets such as Burgess Excel or Supreme Selective.

Guinea pigs are like humans in that they cannot make their own Vitamin C and need to have it in the diet. Most commercial guinea pig foods will have supplementary vitamin C but this can go off over time so it is important not to buy too big a bag. If your guinea pig is unwell, it will need more vitamin C than normal.

Guinea pigs also need a lot of long fibre to keep their teeth under control. A large proportion of their diet should be hay or grass. Leafy greens should also be provided such as dandelion leaves, cabbage, cauliflower leaves, broccoli. Kale can be provided in moderation.

### Company

Guinea pigs are social animals. In the wild they live in close family groups of 5 – 10 individuals, though several groups may live in close proximity to form a colony. They should not be kept on their own, as pets should be kept at least in pairs. Two males kept together may fight so a male-female pair or two females are usually best. If you have a mixed-sex pair, the male guinea pig should be castrated to prevent unwanted pregnancies. This can be done from 4 months of age.

Guinea pigs should not be kept with rabbits as they have different diet requirements, and rabbits can inflict severe injuries on guinea pigs as well as carrying potentially fatal bacteria.

Guinea pigs develop strong social bonds with members of their social group; these relationships are important for reducing stress.

Guinea pigs use urine and secretions from their scent glands to mark one another and to mark out their territories which can cover 1500 square meters.

### Housing

Guinea pigs do not like the cold so should not be kept outside in the winter months. They can be kept indoors or in a frost-free shed or garage (not if used for the car as well). They should have enough warm bedding. Bedding should be safe to eat, e.g. dust-free hay. Don't use softwood products, e.g. pine - these can cause illness wood shavings and/or straw as bedding.

Guinea pigs are quite messy and will generally toilet all over the place so the housing will need regular cleaning.

They need constant access to safe hiding places, pipes and shelters, to be alone/ hide/escape if they feel afraid. Guinea pigs must be able to avoid things that scare them. As they're a prey species, they must be able to hide in a secure place, away from the sight and smell of predators (e.g. foxes/cats/dogs/ferrets/birds of prey).



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## Exercise

Guinea pigs are active up to 20 hours per day and sleep only for short periods and exercise ideally on grass if it is not too cold.

Ensure they have secure accommodation large enough for all to exercise and high enough to stand up fully on their back legs.

## Health

Guinea pigs are generally quite healthy animals and they do not need regular vaccinations. Common ailments include:

### Eye ulcers

Usually from getting a piece of hay or straw stuck in the eye. This needs urgent treatment so if your guinea pig's eye seems sore, get him checked by a vet as soon as possible.

### Mites

These cause hair loss and sometimes intense itching which if left untreated can lead to seizures. Fortunately, there is very effective treatment available so speak to your vet.

### Respiratory disease

If your guinea pig is sneezing a lot or has some discharge from the nose, he will need to be seen by a vet.

### Overgrown nails

Your veterinary nurse can show you how to clip your guinea pigs nails

## Interesting Fact!

Guinea pigs have unique white blood cells called 'Kulloff cells'. These cells act as part of a guinea pig's immune system and function as natural killer cells. They also have a cytotoxic (killing) effect on leukemic cells and may explain why spontaneous tumours are rare in guinea

