

## PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

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Common health problems in chinchillas include:

- **Maloccluded (overgrown) teeth.** Symptoms include difficulty eating or not eating at all, drooling and weight loss. Roots of teeth may become infected, and sharp teeth may cause cuts on the tongue, cheek or lips. See a vet immediately. Teeth may need to be filed or clipped.
- **Ringworm.** This fungal infection can spread to humans and other animals. Symptoms include hair loss and crusty skin on the ears, face and legs. See a vet. Treatment may include topical or oral medication.
- **Gastrointestinal disease.** Symptoms include lethargy, reduced appetite, little to no feces, diarrhea or a bloated belly. See a vet immediately.
- **Upper respiratory infections.** Symptoms include labored breathing, lethargy, reduced appetite, sneezing, and an accumulation of mucus in the nostrils and on the forearms. See a vet immediately. These infections can be fatal.
- **Fur chewing.** Chinchillas may chew on their own or their cage mate's fur, usually in response to environmental stressors such as an aggressive cage mate or overcrowded cage.

Veterinary examinations every 6–12 months are recommended, as well as a routine check-up after adopting your chinchilla.

Visit a vet immediately if your chinchilla has any of the following symptoms: reduced appetite, diarrhea, no feces, drooling, bloating, lethargy or difficulty urinating.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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For more comprehensive information on chinchilla care, visit:

- [thesprucepets.com](http://thesprucepets.com)
- [petmd.com](http://petmd.com)
- [chinchillachronicles.com](http://chinchillachronicles.com)
- [rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rodents/chinchillas](http://rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rodents/chinchillas)
- [seavs.com](http://seavs.com)

### Area Vets

#### Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services

4015 Rust Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(703) 491-1111

#### Pender Veterinary Clinic

4001 Legato Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22033  
(703) 654-3100

#### Paws, Purrs & Exotics

5838-A North Kings Highway  
Alexandria, VA 22303  
(703) 549-7297

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[tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9](http://tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9)

#### Animal Welfare League of Arlington

2650 Arlington Mill Dr.  
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: 703-931-9241  
[www.awla.org](http://www.awla.org)  
[mail@awla.org](mailto:mail@awla.org)

## CARING FOR CHINCHILLAS

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### A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE





## DIET

### Food

- Hay, such as timothy hay, orchard grass, meadow hay or oat hay should be available in your chinchilla's cage at all times and comprise 80–90% of the diet.
- A hay-based, chinchilla specific pellet should comprise 10% of the diet. Adult chinchillas should receive 1–2 tablespoons of pellets per day.
- Treats, such as dried rose hips, dandelion greens, kale and lettuce, should comprise no more than 10% of the diet. Certain fruits and high-sugar vegetables may be given sparingly (<1 teaspoon per day).

**Do not feed** nuts, seeds, or high sugar commercial treats such as yogurt drops.

### Water

- Provide water in a sipper bottle. Change water daily.

## HOUSING AND GENERAL CARE

### Caging

- A cage should be a minimum of 3 x 2 x 2 feet. The exact dimensions depend on your chinchilla's size. Provide at least 2 extra square feet of floor space for each additional chinchilla.
- Chinchillas can climb and jump up to 6 feet, so a cage with multiple levels or shelves is ideal.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.

### Grooming

- A **dust bath** should be provided to your chinchilla 2-3 times a week to prevent chinchillas from developing greasy, matted fur. Fill a container two inches deep with commercial chinchilla dust, then leave it in the cage for 15 to 20 minutes.
- If left in a dust bath too long, chinchillas may develop eye/respiratory passage irritation.

### Environment

Chinchilla cages should contain:

- A **hiding area**, such as an upturned box or commercially available plastic "igloo."
- Safe materials, such as non-toxic cardboard, untreated wood or commercially available chew toys, to encourage natural chewing behavior.
- Unlimited access to water (in a sipper bottle) and hay (e.g. a hay rack).

Chinchillas function best at temperatures from **55–70°F**. They are susceptible to heat stroke at temperatures above 80°F.

### Bedding

- Chinchillas cages should be lined with a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh. Do not use wood shavings or cat litter.
- Bedding should be spot cleaned daily and changed weekly. Wash cage components thoroughly.

## BEHAVIOR

- Chinchillas should be either housed separately or paired with a **bonded mate**.
- Chinchillas often spread apart their whiskers and the hair on their tails. This may indicate distress, or that a chinchilla is simply examining its environment.
- Chinchillas spray urine to deter predators when they feel threatened, particularly if they have not adjusted to their surroundings yet.
- Chinchillas hop when happy or excited.

### Handling

- Pick up your chinchillas from underneath, with one hand supporting its body and another supporting its legs and pelvis.
- Chinchillas handled in a stressful manner may suffer **fur slip**, a natural defense mechanism in which large patches of fur are shed at once. Pick up chinchillas properly to prevent this.

