

PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

Common health problems in guinea pigs include:

- **Vitamin C deficiency.** Symptoms include reduced appetite, lethargy, bleeding gums, crustiness around the eyes and swollen joints or ribs. Be sure to provide daily vitamin C supplements to prevent this (see **Diet**).
- **Upper respiratory infections.** Symptoms include labored breathing, eye and nostril discharge, lethargy, reduced appetite and sneezing or coughing. See a vet immediately. These infections can rapidly lead to death.
- **Maloccluded (overgrown) teeth.** Symptoms include difficulty eating or not eating at all, drooling and weight loss. See a vet immediately. Teeth may need to be filed or clipped.
- **Parasites.** The most common of these is the mange mite. Symptoms include repeated scratching, hair loss and inflamed skin. See a vet. Treatment may require a topical medication.

Annual veterinary examinations are recommended, as well as a routine check-up after adopting your guinea pig. Weigh your guinea pig weekly to ensure their weight is stable. Weight loss is a common symptom of serious illness.

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

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more comprehensive information on guinea pig care, visit:

- guinealynx.info
- mgpr.org
- cavyspirit.com/care.htm
- 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, Puns & Exotics](#)
5838-A North Kings Highway
Alexandria, VA 22303
(703) 549-7297

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Animal Welfare League of Arlington

2650 Arlington Mill Dr.
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: 703-931-9241
www.awla.org
mail@awla.org

CARING FOR GUINEA PIGS

A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE





DIET

Food

- Timothy hay should be available at all times and comprise the majority of the diet. Orchard grass, oat hay and meadow hay are acceptable alternatives.
- Timothy hay-based pellets are an optional supplement. Offer about 1/8 cup of pellets per guinea pig daily.
- Offer about a cup a day of vegetables or greens such as green pepper, romaine lettuce, green or red leaf lettuce, baby carrots and parsley. Fruits should only be given as a treat occasionally and in small amounts.
- A vitamin C supplement, 50–60mg liquid vitamin C or one Oxbow vitamin C tablet, must be given daily.

Do not feed guinea pigs yogurt drops, nuts, seeds, rabbit food or vegetables high in calcium.

Water

- Provide water in a bottle or bowl. Change water daily.

HOUSING

Caging

- Cages should provide at least 6 square feet of space per guinea pig. Cubes and Coroplast cages are a recommended alternative to small cages sold at pet stores. More information can be found at guineapigcages.com.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.
- Never house guinea pigs with other species.
- Guinea pigs are prey animals. If you have other pets in the house, be sure to select a cage with a top.

Environment

Guinea pig cages should contain:

- An upturned box or commercially available plastic “igloo” for your guinea pig to hide in.
- Untreated wood or commercially available wooden chew toys to encourage natural chewing behavior.
- Unlimited access to water in a water bottle or bowl and hay (e.g. a hay rack). Check water bottle daily to ensure it is functioning and your guinea pig is drinking; guinea pigs are prone to dehydration.

Bedding

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

GENERAL CARE

- Guinea pigs are social animals and should be kept in pairs or small groups. Guinea pig pairs should either be of the same sex, or a neutered male and a spayed female.
- When picking up a guinea pig, support its body with both hands. Do not allow small children to handle guinea pigs.
- Guinea pigs’ nails must be trimmed once a month, at home or by a veterinary technician.

Behavior

- Guinea pigs communicate using a variety of vocalizations. “Wheeking,” a loud squealing or whistling sound, is used to communicate excitement or anticipation, particularly during feeding time.
- A deep purring sound indicates contentedness. A higher-pitched purr indicates fear or irritation. Teeth chattering indicates aggression.
- Guinea pigs often mount their cagemates to assert dominance. If this behavior occurs frequently, it may be a sign of a hormonal imbalance.
- When happy, guinea pigs run around their cages while jumping or twitching, a behavior known as “popcorning.”

