

GUINEA PIG CARE

BY Don Factor, DVM West End Veterinary Office

Guinea pigs are social animals that can thrive with both human and animal companionship. It is important to place their cage near family activity. Never put the cage in direct sunlight or drafts while allowing for adequate ventilation. Guinea pigs need moderate temperatures as they are from cool, dry regions. Understanding the nutritional and behavioral needs of your pet guinea pig will ensure a healthy happy companion.

DAILY FEEDING

Guinea pigs have an absolute requirement for supplemental vitamin C
Give unlimited grass hay (timothy, orchard, brome). Remove all twigs and sticks.
Offer alfalfa during growth and pregnancy
Feed a limited amount of high fiber pellets
Offer vegetables as treats amounting to 1 tablespoon daily
Food bowls should be weighted. Guinea pigs love to dump their food.
Healthy greens (romaine, red leaf, bibb, parsley) should not exceed ¼ cup daily

HOUSING

Use a well ventilated wire cage
Use weighted food bowl and sipper water bottle (guinea pigs drink a lot)
Use safe bedding (no aromatic woods like cedar which can harm the respiratory tract)
Allow for moderate temperatures, good ventilation, and solid flooring
Wire floors are very bad for guinea pig feet
Allow for daily household exercise

BEHAVIOR

Guinea pigs need hay for constant chewing
They will beg for treats and are prone to obesity
They have entertaining noises and body language
They enjoy playing with tunnels and boxes and like to burrow

Enrichment and exercise are often neglected. A unique play system is to fill a toddler pool with hay or shredded paper. Cavies are natural burrowers that will squeak and whistle in their exciting new habitat. They should be allowed out of their cage for handling and play time every day.

Sweet treats, fruit and seeds are unhealthy and will lead to digestive problems and obesity, even when given in small amounts. Like all other small mammals that eat high fiber diets, the simpler and healthier their diet is kept, the healthier they will stay.