

Mountain View Animal Hospital
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Caring for your pet Guinea pig

Guinea pigs are generally very sociable creatures. They are considered very docile in temperament, and tend not to bite or scratch when being handled. One downfall to these lovable creatures is they don't have long life expectancies so they tend not to make good pets for little children who don't understand that part of life just yet.

In the wild guinea pigs live in large open spaces, that are grassy and offer lots of places to hide when needed. Guinea pigs also live in groups, so they do better if they are adopted in pairs or more.

Diet

Guinea pigs are herbivorous animals and do most of their eating in the late afternoon early evening hours. Most of their daily diet is grasses, roots, fruits and seeds. If you are going to own a guinea pig buying the commercially prepared pelleted food made specifically for guinea pigs. Many people think that they can get away with feeding rabbit food to guinea pigs but this is actually not a nutritionally acceptable food for guinea pigs because unlike rabbits, guinea pigs have a dependency on vitamin C. If you are a guinea pig owner keep in mind they need an supplemental source of vitamin C because they cannot produce it on their own and the nutritional value of vitamin C disappears from the pellets within 90 days of bagging. This 90 days is not from when you buy it, it is from when it is produced by the manufacturer. Along with the food you should always add vitamin C to their water source just to make sure they are getting enough each day. A good rule of thumb for supplementing in the water is to add about 200 milligrams of vitamin C to one quart of water, and made fresh every twelve hours. You can also supplement with fresh vegetables such as kale, broccoli, dandelion greens, and small amounts of cabbage or a quarter of an orange daily. The amount of vegetables should not exceed more than 10-15 % of their daily diet.

Cage

Housing of a guinea pig should be at least 100 square inches per adult guinea pig. These enclosures can be made of wire mesh, stainless steel, durable plastic or glass. The last three materials are the preferable way to house a guinea pig. Wood is undesirable because it is not easy to clean and cannot hold up to a guinea pig gnawing on it. Guinea pig housing should also have no sharp edges or any other potential hazards

The bottom or flooring of the cage should be solid and a good amount of bedding. The cage should also be well lighted and have adequate ventilation. Bedding should be non-allergenic, non-toxic, absorbent and relatively dust-free. Shredded paper, wood shavings and processed corn cobs are best for bedding. Sawdust tends to cause an impaction in the outer genitalia of males, though this doesn't effect urination if can be uncomfortable for the male and if you are a breeder it can cause an unsuccessful breeding.

Cages should be placed in an area that is not going to be exceedingly noisy and have needless excitement. Guinea pigs get stressed out very easily and will "freeze" for up to 20 minutes. A visual hiding place should be given to the guinea pigs so that if there is a state in which they panic (scattering of bedding, shrieks and shrills) they can run in, hide and feel secure.

Cages should be cleaned and disinfected once weekly. Bowls for food and water bottles should be disinfected daily and you should always have a spare set so that this can be done well, preferably with either a dishwasher or hot water and a mild dishwashing soap. If there is a scaly type deposit left on the bottom of the cage, you can use vinegar to help remove it, this is caused by crystalline urine. The cleaning is important to keep the environment as healthy as possible for you guinea pigs to limit any cause of disease.

Conditions Requiring Veterinary Attention

Every guinea pig can greatly benefit from an annual exam at a veterinarian to make sure that there are none of the following conditions occurring. Guinea pigs are great at hiding illnesses, some of these illnesses include:

Malocclusion of Premolar teeth	Vitamin C deficiency (Scurvy or Scorbutus)
Hair loss	Heat Stress
Cancer	Footpad Infections
Cervical "Lumps"	Pneumonia
Intestinal Infections	Ringworm
Viral disease	Lice Infestations
Mite Infestations	Intestinal Parasite Problems

Vital Statistics:

Life Span	3-4 years
Potential Life Span	6-7 years
Desirable Environmental Temp.	65-75 °
Desirable Humidity	40-70 % (50% is ideal)