



Exotic Animal Hospital of Philadelphia

CARE OF GUINEA PIGS

You got a new guinea pig? Congratulations!

Please refer to this handout in helping you setting your new guinea pig up for success as most of the diseases and emergency presentations to the veterinary hospital stem from improper husbandry and could be avoided.

Did you know?

- Their average lifespan is about 5- 7yrs.
- They reach sexual maturity at 2-3 months for the females and 3-4 months for the males
- After 6months of age, we discourage mating them because they have birthing complications due to pelvic bone structural changes.
- Be careful when introducing 2 new males together in a cage
- Common Problems: Dental Disease (Overgrown teeth), Gastric Stasis & Bloat, Pododermatitis (Sores on their footpads), Seborrhic Dermatitis (Dry skin), Mites & Lice, Ovarian Cystic Disease, Vaginal Bleeding, Impacted Feces (males)
- Guinea pigs are very gentle and social little pets. They startle easily, but generally enjoy their owners' company and attention. They are quite interactive and communicate through whistles, chirps, purrs and squeaks.
- If housed in groups, beware that men establish a pecking order, and 2 intact males will be aggressive in the presence of females.
- They enjoy toys and playing chase with each other. With gentle handling, guinea pigs tend to bond closely to their owners.



ENCLOSURE:

- A 1.5 foot by 3 foot plastic bottomed cage is a comfortable enclosure for a solitary guinea.
 - You may want to increase the size if you have more than one cavy.
- Safe bedding material includes Carefresh (recycled newspaper litter), newspaper, or fresh hay. **Avoid** wood chips, as some have aromatic oils that can cause liver disease in rodents.
 - Change the cage frequently, as they are sensitive to the smell of ammonia (urine).
- Offer water in a sipper bottle. Check the sipper bottle frequently for leaks, as they commonly leak out.

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- Offer several safe toys (paper towel centers, PVC tubing, wooden toys made for birds), and a plastic igloo or additional box, as they enjoy places to hide.

DIET:

- **The best diet for your guinea pig is HAY HAY HAY!** Timothy hay or orchard grass should comprise about 70-80% of their diet.
 - Oat hay and botanical hay are healthy options as well.
 - **Avoid** alfalfa as it contains a lot of protein and excess calcium
- You should only offer your pet timothy pellets up to the age of 6 months
 - The “gourmet pellets” frequently found in pet stores are filled with things that are hard for their little bodies to digest.
 - Your guinea is a fiber machine, so **avoid** sugars (fruits) and carbs (oats, corn, yogurt treats) because they do not digest them well.
- Greens: **Dandelion greens, collard greens, mustard greens, watercress, red leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, escarole, and endive are all healthy veggies for your pet. Dill and parsley make great treats.** These dark leafy greens are high in calcium and in vitamins A and C.
 - **Avoid** a lot of kale and spinach, as it binds up their nutritional calcium.
- Guinea pigs are unique in that they cannot make their own vitamin C and commonly suffer from deficiencies.
 - A small piece of vitamin C rich vegetable like peppers or parsley could be a great source of vitamin C. (Please see vitamin C handout for more options)
 - Just remember- everything in moderations!
 - **Avoid** vitamin water drops, as vitamin C is light-sensitive and degrades before they can drink it.
- Any abrupt changes in their diet can cause gastric upset, so make changes gradually.
- Any changes in appetite and defecation should be noted and you should call the veterinarian. Remember, when a guinea pig stops eating and passing feces for 8-12 hours, this is an emergency and they should be brought in to see a vet immediately.

You got a newborn baby guinea pig?

Guinea pig mothers feed their babies only a few times per day and then leave them alone to their own devices. Guinea pigs are born precocious - being able to walk, see and hear, and most of them will start nibbling on solids within a few days, as well as drink milk from their mum.

Newborn guinea pigs will nurse for around 3-6 weeks from their mum but within 24 hours will also attempt to eat some hay, greens, and pellets if offered.

You may offer alfalfa and timothy hay and pellets in small quantities

If you think the mother guinea pig is “ignoring” her litter, have a look at the condition of the babies. If the baby’s tummies are round and full-looking, they are active and bright, warm and chatting away, making little noises, then the mother guinea pig is likely feeding them.

If the babies are cold, lethargic or have shrunken bellies, then you may have to intervene. It is a good idea to weigh the babies daily to make sure they are growing and gaining weight appropriately.

Before handling the babies, wash your hands well

This not only helps to remove bacteria but also eliminates any smells from other objects or animals that can stress the babies. Once they're clean, rub your hands in some clean, fresh hay and on the mother guinea pig's fur to scent your hands

It is best to keep the babies in a warm, quiet place and in a small box or carry cage. For heating, two or more babies usually snuggle to keep each other warm. However, if there's only one baby, a warm water bottle or heat pack wrapped in a soft towel can provide an excellent heat source but be sure the guinea pig can crawl away from the heat if it gets too warm.

Many newborn mammals cannot urinate or defecate on their own. Most baby guinea pigs will require the stimulation of the mother's grooming tongue on their bellies and genital region to release a stream of urine and faeces.

To mimic this behaviour use a cotton ball moistened with warm water, and gently tap or rub the urogenital area until you feel the baby's abdominal muscles tense and a stream of urine is released. Getting a urination response may take 15-20 seconds of stimulation, or even more.

Male and female baby guinea pigs should be separated from each other at 3-4 weeks of age to prevent any early pregnancies. Guinea pigs can then be sterilised from 16 weeks.

Top reasons to visit the vet!

Weight Loss

Anorexia & Small fecal Balls in 8-12 hrs = EMERGENCY

Wheezing & Open mouth breathing

Swollen Jaws

Hair Loss or Itchy Skin

Vaginal Bleeding

Diarrhea

Nasal Discharge

Trauma, Lameness, Fractures

Seizures

