

The guinea pig, or cavy, is a rodent that comes from South America. It is related to the chinchilla and porcupine. Guinea pigs are not endangered or threatened in the wild. In South America, guinea pigs are often hunted or raised for meat, but free-ranging animals are not trapped for the pet trade. In the United States, the guinea pig is kept as a pet and is also used in research. Hobbyists breed purebred guinea pigs for shows, but pet stores usually sell cross-bred animals. There are eleven guinea pig breeds recognized in the show ring, including American/English, White-crested, Abyssinian (cover), Peruvian, Silky and Teddy (inside). Guinea pigs are not aggressive, preferring to flee in the face of danger rather than bite or scratch. They are sensitive creatures and can become panicked if startled by abrupt and loud noises.

Zoological Education Network provides educational materials about exotic companion animals.

Most Common Disorders in Guinea Pigs

Vitamin C deficiency signs, such as bone and tooth abnormalities, abnormal bruises or hemorrhages

Overgrown teeth/malocclusion

Diarrhea/enteritis

Anorexia/weight loss

Pneumonia

Pododermatitis (foot infections)

Abortion/pregnancy toxemia/dystocia

Pregnancy-associated hair loss

Dermatophytosis ("ringworm")/mange dermatitis

Arthritis/septicemia

Bite wounds (if group housed)

Many common disease conditions in guinea pigs are the result of malnutrition. Visiting your exotic animal veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your guinea pig. For help in finding a small mammal veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians (AEMV) by visiting www.AEMV.org and click on "Find an Exotic Mammal Vet."

©2010 Zoological Education Network
800-946-4782 561-641-6745 www.exoticdvm.com

GUINEA PIGS



Companion Exotic Mammal Care
S E R I E S

What to Expect from Your Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs are intelligent and quiet animals. As a solitary pet, it may bond closely to you, greeting you with chirps, purrs, squeaks or whistles. Guinea pigs do not require as much of your time as some other

pets, but the more time you spend with them, the more interactive they will be. They are very active creatures and enjoy running through tunnels and negotiating mazes. They may play with toys, and if you have more than one guinea pig, they will play games of chase with each other.

Guinea pigs are social animals and will establish a pecking order, frequently male-dominated. Overcrowding may incite aggression, and non-castrated males may be aggressive towards other males in the presence of females. Guinea pigs do not adapt well to changes in their food or environment. Hair barbering (chewing of the fur) may occur in situations of stress and overcrowding.

Is Your Guinea Pig a Male or Female?

To determine the sex of your guinea pig, examine its external genitalia: male guinea pigs have large scrotal sacs, and their penis can be easily extruded with gentle pressure, while females have a vaginal membrane. Females are usually smaller than males.

What Should You Feed Your Guinea Pig?

Unlike other animals, guinea pigs are not able to synthesize vitamin C on their own; therefore, a dietary source of vitamin C must be provided daily. Commercial pellets specially formulated for guinea pigs contain vitamin C, but the level may be affected by storage conditions or time. You can provide supplementation with ¼-½ cup kale or cabbage or a 50-mg stabilized

vitamin C tablet daily to ensure adequate vitamin C intake. Fresh timothy or alfalfa hay may be offered for additional fiber. HEALx products* may be beneficial to guinea pigs. If the nails or teeth of guinea pigs are overgrown, evaluate the diet, as it may be inadequate.

Guinea pigs should have fresh, filtered drinking water in a water bottle at all times. Check the water bottle frequently because they like to play with the sipper tube, which may cause leakage. Sometimes they even push food up into the sipper tube.

Where Should You House Your Guinea Pig?

Your guinea pig's enclosure should be at least 1 x 2 feet (30 x 60 cm), but the larger the space, the better. The sides of the enclosure should be at least 12 inches (30 cm) high. Because guinea pigs do not jump or climb, they can be housed in an open-topped enclosure, such as a plastic children's pool, as long as dogs or cats do not have access to it.

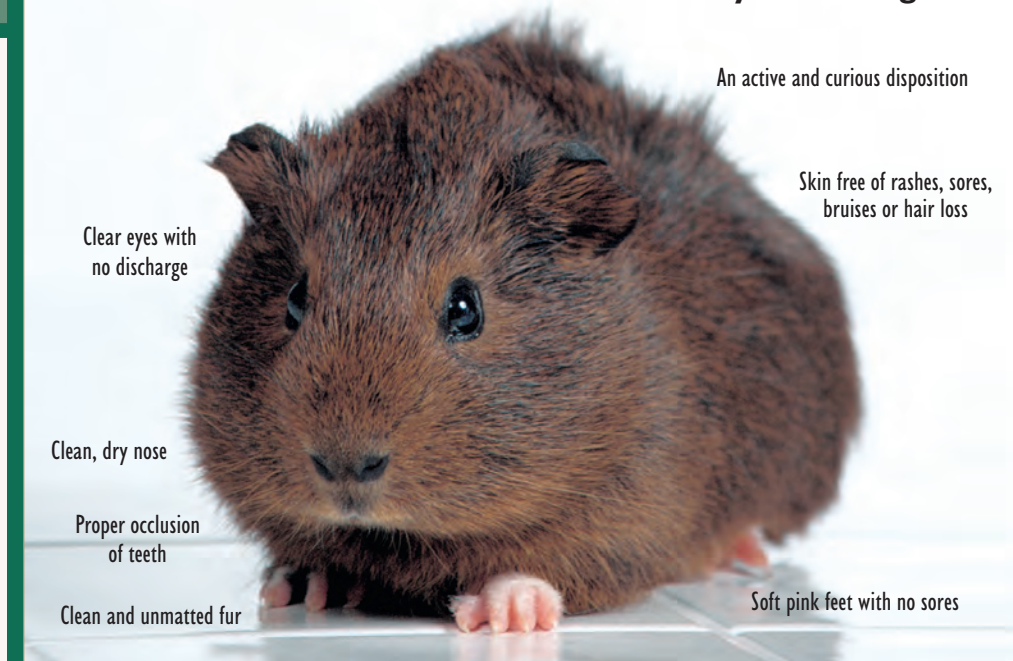
The best flooring for guinea pigs is solid, covered with dust-free bedding of either soft wood shavings (aspen, for example), shredded paper, hay or commercial bedding pellets. While their fecal pellets are relatively odorless, bedding should be changed weekly to control urine odors. Cavies are very sensitive to the ammonia in urine.

What Do Guinea Pigs Do All Day?

Guinea pigs like quiet environments and appreciate having a box or tunnel in which to hide and rest. Your guinea pig will enjoy supervised exercise outside its cage. Like all rodents, guinea pigs explore their world through nibbling on new items; therefore, you should check their play area for any potential hazards.

*www.HarrisonsPetProducts.com

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Guinea Pig



An active and curious disposition

Skin free of rashes, sores, bruises or hair loss

Clear eyes with no discharge

Clean, dry nose

Proper occlusion of teeth

Clean and unmatted fur

Soft pink feet with no sores

How to Keep Your Guinea Pig Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Provide fresh food and water daily.
- ✓ Keep diet stable and minimize treat variety.
- ✓ Ensure a daily source of vitamin C in the diet, either in guinea pig pellets or as a supplement.
- ✓ Remove fresh food that is not eaten within a half hour.
- ✓ Take your guinea pig to an exotic animal veterinarian annually for a physical exam.
- ✓ If your guinea pig has long hair, comb it daily and keep it clipped and clean.
- ✓ Check droppings for evidence of illness: abnormally dry feces may indicate dehydration or constipation, while abnormally soft feces indicate diarrhea.

Housing for your guinea pig should:

- ✓ be set up in a quiet part of the house
- ✓ be maintained in an ambient temperature 55-90°F (13-32°C)
- ✓ include suitable substrates, such as shredded paper (non-inked), recycled newspaper composite materials or pellets, hardwood chips or shavings and compressed wheat straw; cedar chips should be avoided as they may be toxic
- ✓ be cleaned with a change of bedding material every few days
- ✓ offer some sunlight with access to shade to prevent overheating
- ✓ include a box or tunnel for hiding and resting
- ✓ include items for chewing, such as fruit tree branches, which will help keep the teeth worn properly

It is important to prevent guinea pigs from accessing:

- ✗ electrical cords
- ✗ dogs, cats, ferrets and young children
- ✗ pesticides and other toxins
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ cedar or pine shavings
- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ wire exercise wheels
- ✗ plastic toys that can be broken apart and consumed
- ✗ wire flooring in its enclosure
- ✗ furniture
- ✗ refined sugars
- ✗ leaded paint and wood varnish
- ✗ galvanized metal