

Guinea pigs are social pets and loving companions that require daily attention. They communicate by making various sounds whose meanings you may learn and jump (popcorn) in the air when happy!

Use this checklist to make sure that a guinea pig is right for you and your family:

- I have the appropriate housing for this pet
- I understand that male and female guinea pigs should not be housed together
- I can provide daily supervised time for my guinea pig outside of its enclosure
- I can commit to taking appropriate care for my guinea pig
- An adult can provide primary care for this pet

Average size: 20cm to 30cm depending on the type
Life span: 4 to 7 years

FEEDING

It is best to feed a good quality pellet that is specifically designed for guinea pigs. Fresh fruits, vegetables and hay are also diet staples and should always be available. Guinea pigs require 30 to 50mg of vitamin C daily and this can be derived from a vitamin supplement, however with a constant mix of fresh fruit and vegetables (especially the red and orange coloured variety and parsley) your pig should receive sufficient amounts.

Food and water should always be available and fruits and vegetables not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded. We recommend a solid food bowl to prevent spillage and chewing damage.

Treats can also be given (there are many commercial treats available); these are great for training and playtime but they should not exceed 10% of the total food intake. **Do not feed chocolate, alcohol or caffeine as these can cause serious medical problems.**

HOUSING

Your guinea pig should be housed in a hutch that is protected from wind, rain and direct sunlight as guinea pigs cannot cope with high temperatures or rapid changes in temperature.

The hutch size should be at least 60cm x 30cm x 30cm for one guinea pig. It should be escape proof with a solid surface area and plenty of room for exercise and play. There should be an area provided for hiding and resting.

It is best to provide the largest habitat you can afford. 2.5cm to 5cm of bedding should be placed on the base of the house, this may consist of hardwood shavings, aspen bedding or ink free shredded paper. Cedar shavings are not recommended for guinea pigs.

Different types of small animals should not be housed together and adult male guinea pigs should be housed separately as they will fight.

HOUSING MAINTENANCE

Remove the wet spots daily and clean the entire bedding weekly or more frequently as required. Clean the food and water vessels daily.

A good base of natural bedding is great for reducing odours and ensuring your little friend gets a good night's sleep.

Safe chew toys are essential for preventing health problems caused by overgrown teeth.

GROOMING

Guinea pigs are very fastidious about self grooming and generally don't need baths. You may clean them with a damp washcloth and brush them with a soft brush.

Short haired pigs will benefit from a brush and comb once a week.

Long haired pigs will require daily brushing and combing.

Check your pig's nails as these will need clipping about every 4 to 6 weeks.

Always wash your hands before and after handling your guinea pig.

WATER

Fresh clean water should always be available and changed daily. It is best to use a water (sipper) bottle rather than a shallow bowl; as they can get messy and are very easily tipped over.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

Grass is one of the best green foods for your guinea pig (lawn clippings should not be fed). Along with grass you can also feed sow thistle, dandelions, chick weed, and dock. Be careful not to feed hemlock, buttercup, pink clover, rhubarb leaves, or potato leaves as they are poisonous.

Other foods that may be fed are: cauliflower leaves, broccoli, celery, cabbage, pears, silver beet, spinach, carrots, carrot tops, Swede, apples (seeds removed), melons and corn.

Consistent, gentle, daily interaction is the key to winning over your guinea pig. A gentle voice and steady movements will help to calm your pig and win his trust.

HAY

Hay is a very important part of your guinea pigs diet. It not only provides a good source of roughage, it is also essential for bedding. This should be freshened up daily. The best type of hay is Timothy Hay. Alfalfa hay is too high in calcium for guinea pigs.

BEHAVIOUR AND EXERCISE

Your new guinea pig will want to be left alone for the first couple of days after you get him home. He will run away from you when you first put your hand into the cage but with patience and some tasty vegetable /fruit bribes in your hand he will come around.

Exercise is important. A large cage will help here but a daily run on a large surface area such as the kitchen or bathroom floor will be much enjoyed by your pig.



Make sure that this area is safe and escape proof for him. A treat, chew and a place to hide are good to have in the area. A Guinea pig will chew anything in its path, including electrical wiring so check the area first.

Popcorning – this is a happy sign from your guinea pig. They leap and jump around in short bursts that can seem quite strange. Older pigs tend to be a little less demonstrative.

CHEW TOYS

A guinea pig's teeth continually grow; it is essential that they gnaw in order to keep them at a manageable length. Overgrown teeth can cause serious health problems and need to be assessed by your veterinarian.

Always provide your pig with wooden chews and / or a fruit tree branch.

HANDLE WITH CARE

It is important that you pick up and handle your guinea pig correctly. Guinea pigs should be picked up by placing a hand over their shoulders, which will make them crouch. When they are crouching, your other hand should be used to scoop them up from behind. Always handle your guinea pig with both hands as they startle very easily. Once picked up you should hold them close into your body, and support them from underneath.

The signs of a healthy guinea pig are:

- ▶ Active, alert and sociable
- ▶ Healthy fur
- ▶ Clear bright eyes
- ▶ Eats and drinks regularly
- ▶ Communicates by squeaking
- ▶ Walks normally

The signs of an unhealthy guinea pig are:

- ▶ Diarrhea or a dirty bottom
- ▶ Overgrown teeth
- ▶ Weight loss
- ▶ Skin lesions
- ▶ Abnormal hair loss
- ▶ Lethargy
- ▶ Eye or nasal discharge
- ▶ Gum bleeding

If you notice any of these signs please contact your veterinarian immediately.

Recommended supplies

- ▶ Good sized cage
- ▶ High quality food
- ▶ Water bottle
- ▶ Bedding
- ▶ Vitamin C
- ▶ Hay
- ▶ Food bowl
- ▶ Chew toys
- ▶ Books about care
- ▶ Treats
- ▶ Hiding place / nesting box

