

This guide provides trusted advice from your veterinary team here at the George, on how to keep your guinea pig healthy, comfortable, and well cared for at home.

Environment

Guinea pigs are social animals that require as much room as possible to explore and move around. The general guideline is that each guinea pig should have a minimum of 7.5 square feet of living space. However, a larger space is always better as it allows for more enrichment activities and to prevent boredom and health issues. Examples include: a converted garden shed or wendy house, indoor enclosure/playpen, outdoor runs/pens or a large hutch with attached run.

Location

- Out of direct sunlight
- With a little bit of shade
- Protected from the wind and rain
- Plenty of areas to hide
- If outside provide sufficient bedding to keep them warm



Diet

A guinea pig's diet should be made up of the following:

- **85% hay and grass** to which they should have unlimited access. These include timothy hay, oat hay, Orchard grass & meadow grass
- **10% vegetable and herbs**, leafy greens and vegetables, including: broccoli, celery, curly kale, dandelion leaves, parsley, coriander
- **5% pellets** balanced and species specific
- **Occasional fruit and treats only** to be given in small amounts due to sugar content - no seeds.



It is recommended to feed your guinea pigs one cup of fresh vegetables, greens and foraged foods daily to provide them with essential nutrients such as Vitamin C. Give them a variety of at least five to six different types each day, and be sure to include some that are high in Vitamin C.

Behaviours

- Wheeking – a high-pitched whistle, often used to demand attention, food, or to announce their presence
- Chattering - a clacking of their teeth, indicating that they are annoyed
- Popcorning - jumping up and down in the air, this is a sign of happiness and excitement
- Head rearing - raising the head and shoulders, often a sign of dominance

- Purring - a low, rumbling sound which shows relaxation, especially when being held or petted
- Chutting - a low, purring sound indicating contentment and happiness
- Clicking, crackling, hooting or wheezing - these sounds can indicate respiratory distress and require immediate veterinary attention
- Squealing - a loud, high-pitched sound indicating fear, pain or distress

Enrichment

- Guinea pigs love to explore and hide. Provide them with tunnels, cardboard boxes or even woven hides
- Offer chewing toys such as wooden sticks, blocks to keep the teeth healthy and provide mental stimulation
- Use puzzle toys where they have to work for their treats or food
- Rotate toys regularly to keep your guinea pigs interested
- Hide treats or small portions of their food around their enclosure to encourage foraging
- Create your own enrichment by stuffing toilet paper rolls with hay, making cardboard box mazes or filling empty egg cartons with hay/grass

Companionship

Guinea pigs are social animals and are best kept in pairs or small groups. Single sex groups or pairs are ideal as well as paired male and female guinea pigs. But to avoid them mating, it is important to have the male neutered.



Companionship is important as guinea pigs have very high social needs. It also reduces stress and boredom, reduces aggression and helps them mimic their natural behaviour in the wild where they live in herds. Never pair a guinea pig with a rabbit or chinchilla, they have very different food and housing needs, they could fight. And can transmit diseases to one another.

Bonding Tips

Never put your guinea pigs together straight away. Start by swapping their toys over so they can get used to each other's smell and put their housing next to each other.

When introducing them for the first time, this is best done in a neutral area with lots of hiding places, tunnels and food. Observe them carefully for any signs of aggression or dominance and separate if necessary. Offer treats as a positive reinforcement during the introduction process to encourage positive interactions.

Positive behaviours:

- Sharing food and water
- Grooming each other
- Relaxed posture in each other's company

Negative behaviours:

- Biting
- Chasing
- Teeth chattering
- Raised hackles

Neutering

Male guinea pigs can be neutered as soon as their testicles are visible, typically around 3-4 months of age. Neutering allows males to live safely with females without the risk of breeding. Spaying a female is more of an invasive procedure and not usually necessary unless there is a medical indication (for example, ovarian cysts).

Unlike rabbits, neutering male guinea pigs doesn't affect their behaviour and will not reduce fighting between a pair. The general advice is to only neuter male guinea pigs if they cannot be paired with a male due to fighting and need to be paired with a female.

Common Conditions**Respiratory infections**

Pneumonia is one of the most significant diseases of guinea pigs. This can be caused by several bacteria such as Bordetella, Staphylococcus and Streptococcus. Guinea pigs can naturally harbour these bacteria and may be healthy carriers with no symptoms.

Inner ear infections

Symptoms of this often presents as a head tilt but may also cause inappetence and weight loss. Treatment of this may involve antibiotics and anti-inflammatories prescribed by your vet.

Gut stasis

This is also seen in rabbits and is the common term to describe a reduced or absent gastrointestinal motility. This can damage the intestinal tissues, release toxins, cause diarrhoea, and if left untreated, death.

Scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency)

Guinea pigs cannot produce their own Vitamin C, so it is important they consume this through their diet. It is vital for the normal development and maintenance of skin and joints, and important in the normal immune system function. Lack of Vitamin C can make guinea pigs more prone to other diseases/infections. Some clinical signs of this include; rough hair coat, reluctance to walk, swollen feet or joints, and ulcers in the gums or skin.

Abscesses

These are infected swellings that contain an accumulation of pus and bacteria. Guinea pigs form thick pus that cannot be drained, so most abscess in these animals require surgical removal.

Urinary problems

Guinea pigs are prone to the development of urinary calculi (stones). These stones most often form in the bladder but may also form in the kidneys or ureters. Male guinea pigs are at high risk for life-threatening obstruction of stones in their urethra. Immediate veterinary attention is required.

Skin diseases (Pododermatitis)

These are pressure sores that develop on the bottoms of the feet. It occurs in guinea pigs who are overweight, arthritic, or housed on dirty cages that abrade the feet. Treatment requires routine veterinary care in conjunction with diligent at-home care.

**Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns on
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