



Chinchillas

Chinchilla lanigera

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Chinchillas are originally from regions of the Andes Mountains in South America. They have a gentle temperament and rarely bite. They are very agile climbers, have excellent balance and can jump up to 3 feet straight up. They are naturally nocturnal. Male chinchillas weigh between 450 and 600 grams, while females weigh 550 to 800 grams. Chinchillas usually live about 10-13 years. Be careful when picking up chinchillas not to grab them by the hair. They have a defense mechanism, called “hair slip”, which can cause the grabbed hair to fall out. The chinchilla is not hurt, but it may take a couple of months for the hair to grow back. Do not grab chinchillas by the tip of the tail; it is easy to pull off! Pick up chinchillas with two hands: one holding on over the shoulders or under the abdomen and one holding on to the base of the tail.

Health care: Chinchillas can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Chinchillas need to eat very frequently throughout the day to keep their GI tract healthy. Chinchillas that are not eating normally should see a veterinarian as soon as possible. Common health problems in chinchillas include dental disease (typically from improper diet), respiratory disease, GI bloat (often from dietary problems), heat stroke, penile hair rings (hair getting wrapped around the penis and restricting circulation), and conjunctivitis. Remember, the sooner we see a problem, the easier it is to treat!

Husbandry concerns: Chinchillas can be kept alone but generally get along in groups as well. They are often easier to introduce to new chinchillas when they are younger. Chinchillas are very active and need large cages: 6 x 6 x 3 feet. Chinchillas love to climb and tiered cages are preferred. Good ventilation is important for chinchillas to stay healthy and wire sided cages work best. The bottom of the cage should be covered so that chinchillas are not standing on bare wire. Plastic bottomed cages covered with news paper work well. Avoid cedar or pine bedding as the strong smell and oils in the wood can be irritating. Chinchillas need a nest box to sleep in and feel safe. Chinchillas do not tolerate hot temperatures well and can suffer from heat stroke at temperatures above 80F. They should be kept at 55-70F and less than 50% humidity. High humidity can predispose chinchillas to respiratory disease. Do not get chinchillas wet as their fine fur can be difficult to dry and this will strip their fur of natural oils. Chinchillas can be

More on the back!

trained to pee in a litter box, but typically not to poop there. It is usually easiest to just place the litter box where the chinchilla seems to pee most of the time. Once the chinchilla starts using the litter box, you can slowly move it to a more convenient place. Do not house chinchillas with rabbits or guinea pigs as they can carry respiratory diseases that make chinchillas very sick. Keep all dogs in the house vaccinated for Bordetella (kennel cough) as this may be contagious to chinchillas. Teeth trims are not typically required for chinchillas on an appropriate diet and should only be done by a veterinarian as teeth can be fractured if trimming is done improperly.

Dust baths: Chinchillas need to be given access to a dust bath from 3x a week, in dry climates, to every day in more humid climates, to groom themselves properly. Special dust for chinchillas can be purchased at the pet store. A box or container with tall sides should be filled 1 inch deep with dust and left in the cage for 15-30 minutes. Over dust bathing can cause dry skin.

Diet: Chinchillas should always have access to as much grass hay as they want to eat. Alfalfa hay is too high in calcium for chinchillas and can predispose them to bladder stones. Pellet diets are usually alfalfa based and do not wear down teeth properly. Chinchillas do not need to be fed any pellets, but can be given up a tablespoon of pellet feed per day. Any pellets fed should be high quality, 16-18% protein, 2-5% fat and 18% fiber. Chinchillas do not do well with sudden diet changes, so new foods should be introduced slowly over time. If you need help converting your chinchilla from a pelleted diet to hay, please talk to your veterinarian. Fresh greens can also be added to the diet: basil, endive, wheat grass, dandelion leaves, collard greens, cilantro, raspberry leaves, black berry leaves, carrot tops and escarole. Fresh vegetables make good treats! Most other things are too high calorie. Treats should add up to 1 teaspoon or less per day. Chinchillas should always have access to clean water. Sipper bottles need to be cleaned regularly with a pipe cleaner to prevent them from clogging. Having more than one sipper bottle is a good idea incase one gets clogged between cleanings. Fresh tree branches for climbing and gnawing can be good enrichment: cottonwood, maple, elm, birch, but be sure to avoid potentially toxic woods: cedar, plumb, cherry, redwood, or oleander among others.

Reproduction: Chinchillas reach sexual maturity between 8 and 18 months of age and breed between November and May. Their gestation is 111 days to deliver litters of 1-6 pups. Pups should be delivered within an hour or less. They are weaned at 6-8 weeks.

