



## Guinea Pig

*Cavia porcellus*

Amanda Zellar, DVM

Guinea pigs, also known as cavies, are originally from South America. Adult female guinea pigs generally weigh 700-900 grams and males 900-1200 grams. They can live 6-10 years.

**Husbandry concerns:** Guinea pigs can be housed alone or in groups. Guinea pigs need well ventilated cages. Wire sided cages work best. As they are not very good climbers, open topped pens with walls that are 12 inches or taller work well. The bottom of the cage should have 2 inches of soft bedding for the guinea pig to stand on. Wire grate or hard cage bottoms can lead to foot problems. Good bedding substrates include paper based bedding, soft towels or fleece blankets. Avoid cedar and pine bedding as the strong smell and oils in the wood can be irritating. Bedding should be changed twice a week. Guinea pigs should be kept at 65-70F, out of hot direct sun as they are prone to heat stroke. Do not house guinea pigs with rabbits as this puts them at risk of a serious bacterial pneumonia, bordatella. Many guinea pigs need periodic nail trims. This can be done by a veterinarian if they are uncooperative at home. Watch out for the “quick”, the sensitive part of the nail with nerves and blood vessels. This can be tricky with black nails.

**Teeth trims:** Teeth trims should only be done by a veterinarian, as serious harm can be done if they are not performed correctly. Most guinea pigs, on a good diet, do not need their teeth trimmed, unless their teeth are not well aligned. Those that do will probably always need periodic trims.

**Diet:** Obesity is a common problem in guinea pigs and can predispose them to foot problems. Guinea pigs should always have access to as much grass hay as they want to eat. Alfalfa hay is too high in calcium for guinea pigs and can predispose them to bladder stones. Pellet diets are usually alfalfa based, too high calorie and do not wear down teeth properly. Guinea pigs do not need to be fed any pellets, but can be given up a tablespoon of pellet feed per day. If you need help converting your guinea pig from a pelleted diet to hay, please talk to your veterinarian. Guinea pigs need to have vitamin C in their diet every day! Guinea pigs need at least 10mg of vitamin C per day. Deficiencies in vitamin C can predispose to many diseases. Strips of bell pepper are very high in vitamin C and usually guinea pig favorites! Vitamin C does not last long in pellets or water supplements, neither of these is a good way to make sure your pet is getting the nutrient it needs! Another way to give your pet vitamin C is to use vitamin C chewable treats, however the vitamin C in these will also degrade over time. Fresh greens and vegetables make good treats for guinea pigs, but should make up less than 10-15% of what a guinea pig eats in a day. Leafy greens are best including: lettuce, spinach, dandelions, blackberry leaves, raspberry leaves, grasses, cilantro, carrot tops and parsley. Most other things are too high in calories. Guinea pigs should always have access to clean water. Sipper bottles need to be cleaned regularly with a pipe cleaner to prevent them

**More on the back!**

from clogging. Having more than one sipper bottle is a good idea in case one gets clogged between cleanings.

**Health care:** Guinea pigs can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. It is very common for new guinea pigs to have ring worm. Many animals can carry the disease without showing signs. It is recommended that new guinea pigs be treated for ring worm. 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. Guinea pigs need to eat very frequently throughout the day to keep their GI tract healthy. Guinea pigs that are not eating normally should see a veterinarian as soon as possible. As little as 3 days without eating can be fatal. Ovarian cysts are very common in unspayed female guinea pigs.

**Reproduction:** Guinea pigs reach sexual maturity as early as 2 months old. Gestation is 59-72 days for an average litter size of 1-3 babies weighing 70-100 grams. Female guinea pigs that have not had a litter before 6-7 months of age should not be bred; at around 6-7 months old the pelvic symphysis will fuse in a female guinea pig causing the birth canal to be too small for a natural delivery of babies, requiring a C-section. Babies are normally delivered in 30 minutes with about 5 minutes between pups.

