

## **GUINEA PIG GENERAL CARE GUIDE**

### **Please read this important information about your Guinea Pig(s):**

Guinea pigs are one of the most wonderful pets to be owned by! They can live as long as 9 years (the average is 5 to 7), so the decision to bring one or more into your home must be made carefully.

Your guinea pig (also known as Cavy) will depend on you for food, water, medical care, a safe environment and companionship. The advice in this care guide will help give your guinea pigs a healthy start so you can enjoy each other for many years.

**Please note:** Guinea pigs are a highly social, herd type animal. They do better in groups and statistically live longer, healthier lives with others. A pair of same sex or neutered/spayed guinea pigs is a better option than just one. The cost of taking in another guinea pig is minimal, maybe a 25% increase. There are rare cases of the guinea pig who is happier being a loner, but it is very unusual and definitely not the norm.

**Housing:** (Where will my guinea pig live?) Bigger is better when it comes to cage size for guinea pigs. Guinea pigs are not climbers, and cannot use exercise wheels, but they do like space to "zoom" around in!

Visit **<http://www.guineapigcages.com/>** to see how to build inexpensive C&C cages (cubes and Coroplast). Ideally your cage should include 7 sq. feet per cavy. Larger cages actually require less frequent cleaning and provide space for exercise, houses and toys. Avoid wire bottoms, and ramps or ledges on which they can catch their feet. Aquariums and plastic tubs should never be used as they are much too small, have poor ventilation and isolate the guinea pig. **Never house your guinea pig outside!** They are prey animals and can be attacked by hawks, raccoons or have a heart attack from fright.

**NEVER USE WHEELS OR PLASTIC BALLS! THEY ARE DANGEROUS AND CAN CAUSE SEVERE BACK OR FOOT INJURY!**

**Bedding:** (What goes on the bottom of my cage?) Cage floors should be covered with 1 to 2 inches of Carefresh, Yesterdays News (paper shavings) aspen shavings or **kiln dried pine** (not regular pine). **NEVER use Cedar shavings or non-kiln dried pine shaving.** They contain oils which can lead to respiratory problems. Sawdust and cat litter are also not recommended. Many guinea pig owners have taken to using cage size pieces of fleece as bedding, which has many benefits. Fleece is gentle on feet, which can be a great comfort to older guinea pigs.

For ideas and info on how to use fleece, visit:

**<http://www.guineapigcages.com/forum/bedding/21568-fleece-project-study.html>**

It is important to always make sure there is clean and dry bedding. Soiled and wet bedding can cause many health problems.

It is very important to monitor the temperature of your home, especially here in Southern California where temperatures can soar in the summer. Guinea pigs prefer to live in a 60-75 degree climate. They can get heat stroke and die in any temperature over 85 degrees. If your home does not have air conditioning, and temperatures climb, move the cage to the coolest room, purchase fans, put frozen water bottles and ice packs in cage and ceramic tiles. See link for more on keeping your cavy cool  
<http://www.guinealynx.info/records/viewtopic.php?t=26>

### **Vitamin C:**

**This is extremely important** with Guinea pigs because like humans, they can not produce their own and can develop scurvy, a life threatening disease. Humans and Guinea pigs can develop scurvy within 60-90 days without sufficient vitamin C. Guinea pigs need a minimum of 50 mg daily for a healthy animal. This should be doubled for a sick or compromised animal. You can use Oxbow Vitamin C tablets (available at PetSmart and other pet stores or on-line). One tablet per pig daily. If the pig won't eat the tablets, you can dip them in banana baby food, or use liquid Child Life Vitamin C, available at Whole Foods and health food stores, which is preferred.. You can also order on line. This one is highly recommended because you know how much each animal receives especially for sick animals. If you feed liquid C, give 1cc directly into the mouth, daily.

Never put vitamin C liquid or anything else in their water. **Vitamin C can not be over emphasized.** Your pig **must** have supplemented C every day of it's life if you want a healthy pig. They do not get sufficient amounts in their veggies, from fruit or pellets, even when fed pellets with added C. You can not overdose them with C because they will eliminate the excess in their urine. Scurvy can cause multiple illnesses and conditions in Guinea pigs and should not be taken lightly. Congestive heart failure is the primary cause of death in Guinea pigs at this time and is directly related to the lack of vitamin C and scurvy. <http://www.guinealynx.info/scurvy.html>

### **Diet: (what do they eat, and eat and eat! ?)**

It is important to adhere to the diet guidelines listed in the next section. This is the healthy diet that Guinea pigs need. Not only is it the healthiest diet, but your new Guinea Pig is used to it and it is important to keep the diet the same. Always monitor your guinea pigs diet and see a vet immediately if you notice that they have stopped eating. **Even one missed meal is dangerous for your guinea pig and will require a vet visit.**

### **Fresh Water:**

Guinea pigs drink a lot of water and need the bottles cleaned and fresh water added daily. It is recommended that you have more than 1 water bottle in the cage. Do not put anything but water in the bottles. **Do not put vitamin C drops in the water.** Bowls of water are not recommended because they get dirty and pigs have difficulty drinking from them.

### **Pellets:**

At least 1/4 cup daily per animal of **Oxbow Cavy Cuisine** or other high quality Timothy pellets. No pellets with pieces of fruit, nuts or seeds. Although the Guinea pigs may prefer these pellets, they are like junk food and have very little nutritional value. No alfalfa based pellets, except for nursing mothers and babies under 6 months old.

### **Fresh Veggies:**

At least 1/2 cup of greens and veggies daily per pig, one half in the morning and one half at night. Green and red leaf lettuce, Romaine, Endive, Escarole and cilantro are best. No Iceberg lettuce. Limit, parsley, dandelion greens, carrot tops and kale because they are high in calcium and may cause bladder stones. A very small piece of bell pepper, 1 clean piece of corn husk, a small piece of cucumber with the wax washed off can be given daily. Do not give all of them in one day. We do not recommend corn since it is high in sugar. Limit all fruits like apples, bananas, etc. to one very small piece once a month. No grapes or raisins since they may be toxic to Guinea pigs.

### **Fresh Hay:**

Make sure a good quality Timothy hay is unlimited and available 24/7. It is one of the best things that you can do for the health of your cavy. Alfalfa hay should only be fed to babies under the age of 6 months, or pregnant or nursing mothers because of the high calcium content. You can buy hay from any feed store. It is sold in flakes. You can also feed oat hay at one feeding.

Orchard Grass, Blue Grass, and very soft Timothy hay is not usually recommended because Guinea pigs need the roughage to keep their teeth ground down and them free of digestive problems. The coarser the hay, the better .

### **Treats:**

Limit treats to healthy veggies like bell pepper. Limit all fruits and carrots because of sugar content. High sugar foods can cause yeast infections, bloat and digestive problems that can be life threatening. Do not give treats from pet stores with nuts, honey, sugar, seeds, or yogurt drops, etc.

## **NOT RECOMMENDED IN DIET**

Avoid mixes or treats with nuts, seeds, dried fruit and dyed pieces.

Do not feed dairy and meat products (cavies are herbivores)

Avoid seeds in husks (like sunflower seeds), which can be a choking hazard.

Do not feed rabbit pellets (they do not contain Vitamin C and some may even include antibiotics toxic to cavies).

Avoid cruciferous vegetables (cabbage, collards, bok choy, broccoli), as they can cause gas in your pet which leads to bloat, a life threatening condition.

Do not use mineral wheels or salt licks. Never use Tang (which contains dyes, refined sugars, and very little vitamin C) in drinking water.

Avoid commercial treats marketed for cavies (like yoghurt drops) which can even be detrimental to their health. Consuming these empty calories (many contain fat, sugars and even excess calcium) can result in decreased consumption of the basic foods they really need.

## **Exercise:**

Daily exercise outside of the cage will help your guinea pig maintain good health. You can find an enclosed space with an easily cleaned floor such as a bathroom or kitchen and they will slowly begin to explore. Put down some towels or a blanket so they have traction. You can put a paper bag filled with hay, veggies, boxes made into "tunnels" and other fun things to encourage them to explore. Pretty soon they will look forward to this floor time. Never put your Guinea pigs outside for exercise. They can ingest toxins for the grass, or be attacked by cats, dogs, hawks, etc. and can also pick up fleas. They are prey animals and can die from fright if a hawk just flies over them.

## **Grooming (looking and feeling good!)**

### **Bathing**

Guinea Pigs rarely need baths and some are never bathed. If your guinea pig does require one, a shampoo made especially for small animals will be needed. Use a shallow bowl of warm water, rinse and dry thoroughly to avoid chills before returning them to their cage. Do not get water into their eyes and ears.

**Note:** If your guinea pig is extremely itchy, shedding or has flaky dandruff on the skin, a parasite or fungal infection is likely. Please see a cavy knowledgeable vet immediately and visit this site:

**<http://www.guinealynx.info/parasites.html>**

### **Brushing**

Regular brushing with a soft baby brush helps to remove some of the loose hair and lessen shedding. If you have a long haired (Peruvian or Silky) cavy, brushing is a must to avoid tangles. Many owners of long haired pigs, also trim the hair around the bottom to keep them dry and clean.

## **Nails**

A guinea pig's nails grow constantly and will need to be clipped on a regular basis to avoid painful overgrown nails. Close attention must be paid to avoid cutting the quick. A human toenail clipper works great. You can read more here about cutting cavy toe nails. [\*\*http://www.guinealynx.info/nails.html\*\*](http://www.guinealynx.info/nails.html)

## **Health (healthy =happy)**

It is important to pay attention to your guinea pig and watch for any signs of potential illness. Guinea Pigs have a tendency to hide illness, so here are some things to look out for.

## **Weighing:**

Weigh your pig weekly and note any weight loss. Since guinea pigs hide illness, this is often the only sign that something is wrong. Digital kitchen scales work great and are an inexpensive investment. What you are looking for are dramatic changes in weight. A good rule is: One ounce weight fluctuation is OK, two ounces go on alert, three ounces red alert call the vet.

## **WARNING SIGNS OF ILLNESS:**

<http://www.guinealynx.info/emergency.html>

## **List of Cavy Savvy vets in California:**

[http://www.guinealynx.info/cabinet/index.php/Veterinarians\\_California](http://www.guinealynx.info/cabinet/index.php/Veterinarians_California)