

## DIET

A healthy diet for adults is based on guinea pig pellets and quality grass hay, such as timothy hay. Both should be freely available at all times. Babies under six months and pregnant sows need alfalfa hay. A constant supply of hay provides fibre, vital to keep the teeth and digestive system in good shape. Guinea pigs must have adequate vitamin C in their diet. Look for plain pellets containing vitamin C, but without seeds, nuts or coloured treats. The bag should be date stamped to ensure freshness and vitamin C potency.

Also provide each guinea pig with a cupful of mixed fresh vegetables and fruit daily. Choose produce with a high vitamin C content, such as parsley, romaine lettuce, bell peppers and dandelions, occasionally adding a piece of carrot. Fresh water in a sipper bottle should be available at all times. Nutritional supplements are not necessary if a good, varied diet is provided.

## HEALTH

Find a veterinarian specializing in exotic animals and experienced in treating guinea pigs before you have an emergency. Guinea pigs try to hide signs of illness, so by the time you notice something is wrong, the illness is usually well advanced. The following signs mean your pet needs urgent veterinary care: not eating or drinking, lethargy, sneezing, wheezing, crusty eyes, fluffed up fur, diarrhea, blood in urine, loss of balance, tilted head, excessive scratching or hair loss. Keeping a weekly record of your pet's weight will alert you to weight loss, which often indicates a health problem.

## FERTILITY

Male guinea pigs can be sexually mature at approximately three weeks of age. Determine each pet's sex, and keep males and females separate at all times to prevent unwanted offspring. Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for them, breeding guinea pigs is strongly discouraged. If a male and female are kept together, the male guinea pig should be neutered by an experienced veterinarian who specializes in exotic pets.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Penicillin-based drugs, commonly prescribed for other pets, are toxic to guinea pigs.
- Exercise wheels and balls can cause injury to guinea pigs and should never be used.
- Never leave your guinea pigs unsupervised where a predator or other pet could harm them.

## MORE INFORMATION

*Guinea Pigs: A Complete Pet Owner's Manual*,  
by Katie Behrend

Guinea Pig Care: [www.guineapigs.info](http://www.guineapigs.info)



# A QUICK GUIDE TO GUINEA PIGS



Guinea pigs make delightful companions for both adults and families. Once settled in their new home, guinea pigs are inquisitive, friendly and talkative. Guinea pigs are social animals, so it's best to keep at least two for companionship. Their average life span is four to eight years but, with proper care and nutrition, guinea pigs can live up to ten years.

Before adopting a pet guinea pig, consider the following:

- Guinea pigs need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- Guinea pigs need daily exercise and play.
- All household members should understand how to hold and play with a guinea pig, and they should all be as eager as you welcome a guinea pig or two into the family.

## SETTING UP HOUSE

### Essential items

- Spacious cage with solid bottom (no aquariums!)
- Two water bottles (if you're housing two males or as back-up when you are away from the house)
- One food dish (medium-sized ceramic or attachable bowl to the sides of the cage)
- Two hay racks (if you're housing two males or as back-up when you are away from the house)
- One wooden hiding house
- Soft brush & metal comb for long-haired guinea pigs
- Nail clippers
- Shavings
- Large bag of green timothy hay
- Plain guinea pig pellets (no seeds or nuts!)
- Fresh green vegetables
- Small piece of fruit



### Optional items

- One igloo
- Bird toys made of untreated wood
- Large diameter ferret tubes
- Portable playpen
- Cat carrier for travel
- Bag of alfalfa hay for babies and sows after (not before) they've given birth



### GENERAL CARE

Regular exercise outside the cage is essential for your guinea pig's health, as well as great fun for the family. A room can be made safe for guinea pigs by preventing access to electrical cords, removing hazardous items and blocking gaps under appliances and furniture. Alternatively, a playpen will allow your pets to romp in safety. Guinea pigs enjoy a variety of safe toys such as wide tubes, cartons and wood bird toys.

Most guinea pigs are cautious about being picked up, but love being petted once they are on your lap. Children must be supervised when holding a guinea pig and taught not to hold it too tightly or allow it to fall or jump. Guinea pigs are easily injured and may nip if not handled gently. While your guinea pig is on your lap, brush it gently to keep the coat sleek. An occasional toenail trim should also be part of regular grooming.

**Guinea pigs may be small, but they need roomy cages, a specialized diet, daily cleanup and gentle handling to be happy and healthy.**

### HOUSING

Guinea pigs should be kept indoors, safe from predators and climate extremes. Choose, or make, as large a cage as possible, with plenty of room for exercise. Aquariums are not suitable, due to poor ventilation. Look for a cage with a solid bottom, as wire floors and ramps can injure guinea pigs' feet. Cover the floor with bedding such as pine shavings. Avoid sawdust as well as cedar, which contain harmful oils.

The cage is best kept in a room where your pets can enjoy your company, out of drafts and direct sunlight. A temperature range of 65–75° F is ideal. Guinea pigs love a house or igloo to rest in and appreciate a few safe toys to play with, such as bird toys made from untreated wood. Choose heavy food dishes, or those that clip onto the cage, so the contents don't spill.

Keep your guinea pig's habitat clean by removing soiled litter daily. Wash food dishes, water bottles and the cage bottom once a week. Always rinse and dry the cage well before adding clean bedding and returning your pet.

*Please support the animals in our community.*



Tel: 613-725-3166

email: ohs@ottawahumane.ca  
Charitable #: 123264715 RR0001