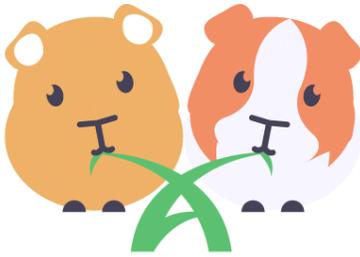


A PET STORE'S GUIDE TO GUINEA PIGS



A little bit tiffy
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GUINEA PIG FACTS

Guinea pigs are instinctive prey animals that live in herds. They prefer having either large amounts of hay or safe bedding to burrow in, or multiple hides to feel safe and comfortable.

Guinea pigs do best with company and can die from loneliness (stress induced cardiomyopathy) if forced to live alone. Same sex pairs with an age gap is recommended.

HEALTH GUIDE

ASSESSING AGE

Guinea pigs are generally not sold until they're at least 6-8 weeks of age. If a guinea pig comes into care that weighs less than 200g, has loose poo and/or is having difficulty eating solid foods, this pig has most likely not been properly weaned and needs formula feeding.

Measuring weight on a digital or kitchen scale will provide the most accurate reading.

ASSESSING WEIGHT

1	Very Thin More than 20% below ideal body weight		Each individual rib can be felt easily, hips and spine are prominent and extremely visible and can be felt with the slightest touch. Under abdominal curve can be seen. Spine appears hunched.
2	Thin Between 10-20% below ideal body weight		Each rib is easily felt but not prominent. Hips and spine are easily felt with no pressure. Less of an abdominal curve can be seen.
3	Ideal		Ribs are not prominent and cannot be felt individually. Hips and spine are not visible but can be felt. No abdominal curve. Chest narrower than hind end.
4	Overweight 10-15% above ideal body weight		Ribs are harder to distinguish. Hips and spine difficult to feel. Feet not always visible.
5	Obese 15-20% above ideal body weight		Ribs, hips and spine cannot be felt or can with mild pressure. No body shape can be distinguished. Underbelly touching floor when Guinea-pig is in standing position, feet cannot be seen.

A healthy guinea pig should be at number 3 on the chart. Number's 2 and 4 can be corrected by changing diet. Number's 1 and 5 will most likely need medical attention to identify any other associated issues.

DIET AND NUTRITION

On a daily basis, guinea pigs need 24/7 access to grass hay for grazing to prevent overgrown teeth, 1/8th cup of high quality pellets (Oxbow, Vetafarm, Burgess), a cup of fresh vegetables, and a source of Vitamin C (which can be achieved through pellets or vegetables).

FOOD TO AVOID

Avoid legume hays (Alfalfa, Lucerne). These are high in calcium and will cause bladder stones.

Avoid pellets with nuts, seeds, oils, dried fruits or coloured "bits".

Never feed dairy, meat, corn syrup or Propylene glycol. These products are fatal to piggies.

COMMON MEDICAL ISSUES

These issues are common and require long term treatments. Please contact us **ASAP** if a guinea pig is presenting with symptoms of any of the following.

BUMBLEFOOT (PODODERMATITIS)

Bumblefoot is a painful infection on the pads of the feet, where the footpad swells, becomes red and inflamed, crusts and bleeds, and forms open sores. This is most commonly caused by rough floors (such as wire based cages) rough bedding (bark or large wood chips), and poor hygiene (dirty, wet or fouled bedding, or food scraps left to rot in the cage). If left untreated, Bumblefoot will infect the bone and require a leg or foot amputation. In severe cases, it's lethal. Treatment requires antibiotics and foot soaks 3-5 times a day.

MALOCCLUSION

Guinea pig teeth continuously grow. Without the silica content in grass hay available for 24/7 grazing, their teeth can overgrow. This results in weight loss and scurvy from being unable to eat, and in painful dental infections and ulcers. Overgrown back molars can also grow into the skull to affect the eyes. Signs include uneven front teeth, eating slower than usual, drooling, dropping food when chewing, and nasal discharge. Treatment is surgical trimming of the teeth.

MITES, LICE AND FUNGAL INFECTIONS

Mites, lice and fungus are both very common occurrence in guinea pigs, and can be contracted from direct contact, bales of hay or grass, from infected bedding or accessories. They cause dry and scaly skin, open sores, intense itchiness, hair loss, pain, weight loss and seizures.

Mange mites are microscopic and burrowing, whereas lice are visible as white, moving dots on the skin. Both require long term treatment of either Ivermectin or Selamectin for 4-6 weeks, dosed depending on the guinea pig's weight. Bedding and accessories should be washed with hot water, bleach or vinegar to ensure no mites or eggs are present elsewhere in the enclosure. Mites and lice cannot spread to humans, therefore gloves and strict quarantine procedures aren't necessary.

Fungal infections often begin at the face, but can still occur elsewhere on the body. These can spread to people and other mammals very easily, it's important to wear gloves and wash hands thoroughly when handling infected patients. Daily oral or topical treatment with an antifungal agent (such as miconazole nitrate) is required for up to seven days after visible signs have disappeared. Treatment time can range from 1 to 6 months depending on severity. To prevent spread of infection, isolate the patient immediately and disinfect all cages and accessories the patient has contacted with boiling water, a fungicide, or bleach.

SCURVY

A Vitamin C deficiency can cause bleeding in the joints, muscles and intestines, loss of movement in the limbs, and death. Signs of scurvy are lethargy and weakness, poor skin and coat condition, loss of appetite and weight, difficulty walking, and diarrhea. Guinea pigs need 10-30mg of Vitamin C a day to prevent this, and 50mg of Vitamin C a day to treat scurvy.

UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTION

Bacterial respiratory infections are incredibly common among pet store rodents, and can be lethal if left untreated. Symptoms include lack of appetite, weight loss, coughing and sneezing, nasal discharge, difficulty breathing and lethargy.

A respiratory infection requires immediate long term treatment with a prescription antibiotic, and is best treated as soon as initial symptoms are identified.

PHOTOGRAPHS FOR IDENTIFICATION OF COMMON MEDICAL ISSUES

MITES (Photos provided from QLD Guinea Pig Refuge and Guinealynx Medical Guide)



FUNGAL INFECTION (Photos provided from Guinealynx Medical Guide)



BUMBLEFOOT (Photos provided from The Guinea Pig Forum and Avalon Guinea Pig Rescue)

