

# guinea pig

## care sheet



Guinea pigs are social companion animals that require daily interaction. They communicate by making various sounds that have different meanings and “popcorn,” or jump in the air, when happy. Includes hairless guinea pigs.

### facts

average adult size: 8 to 11 inches long

average life span: up to 8 years with proper care

diet: herbivore



**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

### diet

A well-balanced guinea pig diet consists of:

- High-quality guinea pig food, Timothy hay and limited amounts of vegetables and fruits.
- Require 30 to 50 mg of vitamin C daily from high-quality food, vitamin supplements or fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C.
- Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water, changed daily.
- Do **not** feed chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

### feeding

Things to remember when feeding your guinea pig:

- Fresh food, Timothy hay and water should always be available.
- A limited amount of vegetables and fruits can be given daily, but should not exceed 10% of their total diet.
- Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.

### housing

- Guinea pigs acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- A minimum 36"L x 30"W x 18"H escape-proof habitat with a solid surface area and plenty of room for exercise and play makes a good home for one guinea pig. It is best to provide the largest habitat possible.
- 1 to 2" of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not recommended.
- Guinea pigs may be kept in same-sex pairs if they are raised together; otherwise, keep adult guinea pigs housed separately. Different types of small animals should **not** be housed together.

### normal behavior and characteristics

- Easy to handle; prefers a routine and similar time for playing, feeding and resting each day.
- Hides in objects, but will come out when people are near the habitat.
- Chew on objects to maintain all their teeth, which grow continuously; ensure they have plenty of chew sticks or mineral chews available.

### habitat maintenance

- Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents at least once a week with a 3% bleach solution. Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the guinea pig back into the habitat.
- Remove wet spots daily; change bedding at least twice a week, or more often as necessary.

### grooming and hygiene

- Guinea pigs stay clean and rarely need baths, but can be spot-cleaned with a damp washcloth or

unscented baby wipes if needed.

- Fur may be brushed with a soft-backed brush. Hairless guinea pigs benefit from a small amount of non-toxic aloe-based lotion rubbed onto skin to keep it soft.
- Guinea pigs need their nails clipped approximately once a month.
- It is normal for a guinea pig's teeth to be yellow; cleaning is not necessary.
- Consult with a veterinarian if a guinea pig's teeth or nails seem too long.

### signs of a healthy animal

- Active, alert and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is unlabored
- Walks normally
- Communicates by squeaking

### red flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss/flaky skin
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Overgrown teeth
- Overgrown nails

*If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.*

### common health issues

| Health Issue | Symptoms or Causes   | Suggested Action   |
|--------------|--|--|
| Diarrhea     | Loose stool caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or other illness.                         | Consult with a veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.        |
| Malocclusion | Overgrown teeth.   | Consult with a veterinarian to have teeth trimmed regularly.         |
| Mites/lice   | External parasites that cause guinea pigs to lose patches of hair.   | Consult with a veterinarian.   |
| Ringworm     | Skin infection caused by fungus.   | Consult with a veterinarian.   |
| Scurvy       | A disease caused by vitamin C deficiency resulting in poor appetite, sore joints and chest and bleeding from the gums. | if untreated, can be fatal; consult with a veterinarian immediately. |

## shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- High-quality guinea pig food
- Timothy hay
- Treats
- Bedding
- Food bowl/water bottle
- Hideaway place
- Toys
- Hay rack
- Wood chews
- Mineral chews
- Vitamin C
- Soft brush and nail clippers
- Styptic powder
- Book about guinea pigs

## sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on guinea pigs and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all small animals are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, Rat Bite Fever and *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your small animal or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Go to [cdc.gov/healthypets](http://cdc.gov/healthypets) and [petco.com/caresheet](http://petco.com/caresheet) for more information about small animals and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to [petco.com](http://petco.com) for more information.

