

**Patton Veterinary Hospital
425 East Broadway
Red Lion, PA
717-246-3611**

GUINEA PIG CARE

Background. Guinea pigs are spunky, rambunctious little critters that can be a real pleasure to have as pets. While technically they are considered rodents, we here in the United States consider them as pets and not pests. Guinea pigs are originally from South America where they were commonly a part of the family meal. It was not until the last 200 years that people started having them as pets. Four primary varieties are commonly encountered in the pet industry. The Shorthair or English is characterized by having a uniformly short hair coat. The Abyssinian has whorls or rosettes in their short, rough, wiry coat. The Silky is a large variety distinguished by its medium length silky hair. The Peruvian is recognized by its very long silky hair. All types are commonly kept as pets.

Diet. Hay is required in the daily guinea pig diet and is considered the most important part. Types of grass hay include timothy, orchard grass brome and others. Alfalfa should be avoided due to its high calorie content and high levels of calcium and phosphorous. Grass hay should be available at all times. It helps stimulate intestinal movement and proper digestion of their food.

Like humans, guinea pigs require Vitamin C (25-50 mg/day) in their diet because they are unable to make their own. Vitamin C is an essential nutrient for musculoskeletal maintenance among other things. Pellet formulas are generally supplemented with Vitamin C; however, it is rapidly broken down within 90 days of its milling date and no longer effective. It is therefore important to supplement their diet with additional Vitamin C. The most effective way is with fresh red peppers (2 Tbsp/day), kale (1/3 cup/day), broccoli (1/3 cup/day) and other fresh produce because they will get other nutrients as well. There are various Vitamin C supplements available as well, but may not be as effective. If you use a Vitamin C supplement, we recommend the Oxbow Vitamin C supplement which comes in 50mg flavored tablets.

Finally, good quality guinea pig pellets should be offered, but only in limited amounts. It is equally important for them nutrient-wise and enrichment-wise to have a varied diet with fresh fruits and vegetables. These little guys become quite excited when getting their daily fruits and veggies.

Housing. The types of enclosures available or options to build are limitless. In general, you should avoid the use of wood and plastics, which can be easily chewed through and hard to clean. The size of the enclosure should comfortably house your guinea pig(s) with at least one open or screened side to provide adequate ventilation. There are no specific lighting requirements. We do not recommend using wire mesh cage bottoms. While they may be cleaner and require less maintenance, your guinea pig will develop sores on their feet and hocks that can become infected.

Handling. Guinea pigs are usually easily handled. They should always be handled in a gentle, stress free manner. Regular interactions will make them accustomed to human contact and allow for a more interactive pet.

Good husbandry and care is the backbone to keeping your guinea pig healthy. If you are able to follow this care guide your problems will be limited. For those times you are unsure of your piggy's health or have any questions, please contact a veterinarian at The Patton Veterinary Hospital.