



Diet & Nutrition for Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs are herbivores, which means their diet should consist primarily of plant-based foods. A balanced diet is essential for their health, helping to prevent obesity, malnutrition, and other health issues such as scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency), digestive problems, and dental issues.

Essential Components of a Guinea Pig's Diet

A guinea pig's diet should be divided into three main categories:

1. **Hay** – the foundation of their diet
2. **Fresh Vegetables** – to provide essential nutrients
3. **Pellets** – as a supplement to ensure proper nutrition

1. Hay (80% of their diet)

Hay is the most important part of a guinea pig's diet. It provides the necessary fiber for proper digestion and helps wear down their continuously growing teeth.

- **Types of Hay:**

- **Timothy Hay:** The most commonly used hay for guinea pigs. It is high in fiber and helps keep teeth and digestive systems healthy.
- **Meadow Hay:** Another great option that provides variety.
- **Orchard Grass Hay:** Sweet-smelling hay that is softer and easier to chew, often favored by guinea pigs.
- **Oat Hay:** Ideal for guinea pigs, though it should be fed less frequently compared to other hays.

Amount: Provide unlimited hay at all times. They should have access to fresh hay 24/7.

2. Fresh Vegetables (15% of their diet)

Fresh vegetables provide essential vitamins (particularly Vitamin C) and other nutrients. Vegetables also provide hydration and additional fiber.

- **Recommended Vegetables:**

- **Leafy Greens:** Romaine lettuce, kale, dandelion greens, collard greens, Swiss chard, and parsley. Avoid iceberg lettuce as it has little nutritional value.
- **Bell Peppers:** High in Vitamin C, bell peppers (especially red peppers) are great for guinea pigs.

- **Carrots:** High in Vitamin A, but feed in moderation due to sugar content.
- **Cucumber:** Low in calories and hydrating.
- **Tomatoes:** High in Vitamin C, but give them in moderation due to acidity.
- **Cilantro:** A favorite of many guinea pigs, packed with nutrients.
- **Spinach:** Feed occasionally, as it is high in calcium.

Amount: Offer a variety of fresh vegetables every day. A typical serving is about 1 cup per guinea pig, but adjust depending on your guinea pig's size and activity level.

3. Pellets (5% of their diet)

Pellets are a convenient source of additional nutrients. However, they should not be the main component of a guinea pig's diet, and they should be high-quality, free from added sugar, seeds, or colored dyes.

- **Types of Pellets:**

- **Timothy Hay-based Pellets:** These are ideal as they are fiber-rich and made from the same hay guinea pigs need.
- **Vitamin C Fortified Pellets:** Since guinea pigs cannot produce their own Vitamin C, it is important to ensure their pellets contain this nutrient.

Amount: A small handful (1/8 to 1/4 cup) per guinea pig, per day.

4. Vitamin C (Essential Supplement)

Guinea pigs cannot produce Vitamin C, so it's crucial to ensure they get enough of it in their diet.

- **Vitamin C Sources:**

- **Fresh Vegetables:** Bell peppers, kale, parsley, and tomatoes are high in Vitamin C.
- **Supplements:** If your guinea pig isn't getting enough Vitamin C from vegetables, you can offer Vitamin C drops in their water or provide chewable Vitamin C tablets (designed for guinea pigs).

Amount: Guinea pigs need about 10-30 mg of Vitamin C per day. Be cautious about providing too much, as excess Vitamin C can cause digestive issues.

Foods to Avoid

Some foods can be harmful or unhealthy for guinea pigs and should be avoided:

- **Citrus Fruits:** Too acidic for guinea pigs and can cause mouth sores or digestive issues.
- **Iceberg Lettuce:** Lacks nutritional value and can cause diarrhea.
- **Seeds and Nuts:** Guinea pigs can't digest seeds or nuts properly, and they are too high in fat.
- **Processed Foods:** Foods with added sugars, preservatives, or artificial colors should never be fed.
- **Onions and Garlic:** Toxic to guinea pigs and can cause digestive upset.

- **Potatoes:** Contain solanine, which is toxic to guinea pigs.
- **Avocado:** Contains persin, which can be harmful to guinea pigs.
- **Chocolate and Sugary Treats:** These are unhealthy and can cause obesity and other health problems.

Treats and Snacks

Treats should be given in moderation and should never replace the main components of the diet.

- **Safe Treats:**
 - **Fresh fruits:** Small portions of fruits like apples, strawberries, or bananas. Fruits should only be given in moderation due to their sugar content.
 - **Herbal Treats:** Small amounts of dried herbs such as basil, thyme, or oregano.
 - **Hay Cubes or Hay-based Snacks:** These are good options as they provide fiber and are safe.

Amount: Limit treats to once or twice a week, and only in small amounts.

Water

Guinea pigs should always have access to fresh, clean water. Dehydration can lead to serious health problems.

- **Water Bottles vs. Bowls:** Water bottles are generally preferred because they keep the water cleaner, but guinea pigs may also drink from a water bowl if it is cleaned frequently.

Amount: Ensure your guinea pig has fresh water available at all times.

General Feeding Guidelines

- **Consistency:** Try to feed your guinea pig at the same time each day, with fresh vegetables and hay always available.
- **Monitor Weight:** Regularly check your guinea pig's weight. If they are losing weight, their diet may not be meeting their needs.
- **Gradual Changes:** If changing their diet (for example, switching hay or vegetables), do so gradually to avoid digestive upset.

Important Nutritional Considerations

- **Calcium:** Guinea pigs need calcium for strong bones and teeth, but too much calcium can lead to kidney stones. Ensure that you balance calcium intake with other foods. High-calcium foods like spinach or kale should be fed in moderation.
- **Fiber:** Fiber is crucial for a healthy digestive system. Always ensure your guinea pig has access to high-fiber hay.
- **Vitamin C:** As mentioned earlier, guinea pigs need an external source of Vitamin C. Monitor their intake, especially if they're not eating enough fresh vegetables.

A well-balanced diet is crucial for your guinea pig's health and longevity. The majority of their diet should be made up of hay, followed by fresh vegetables and a small amount of pellets. By offering a variety of vegetables and ensuring they receive plenty of Vitamin C and fiber, you can keep your guinea pig healthy and active.

Always monitor your guinea pig's eating habits, and if you notice any changes in their appetite, behavior, or weight, it's a good idea to consult a vet to rule out health issues.

Let me know if you need more details or specific information!