



## Intro to Caring for Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs, also known as cavies, are social, gentle, and curious rodents. They are a popular pet choice because of their affectionate nature and relatively simple care needs. Guinea pigs make wonderful pets, particularly for families and individuals looking for a low-maintenance yet affectionate companion. These small rodents are known for their gentle nature and ease of handling, making them great for children and first-time pet owners. Guinea pigs are social animals that thrive in pairs or small groups, so they benefit from the company of their own kind, which helps prevent loneliness and stress. They are also relatively easy to care for, requiring a clean cage, fresh water, and a balanced diet of hay, pellets, and vegetables. Their playful personalities and cute vocalizations, like squeaks and purrs, can provide endless entertainment and joy.

Despite their small size, guinea pigs need enough space to roam and explore. Their cages should be large enough to accommodate their active nature, and regular out-of-cage time is important for mental and physical stimulation. They have a relatively long lifespan compared to other small pets, living anywhere from 4 to 8 years, and require consistent care throughout their lives. Guinea pigs also enjoy interaction with their human owners and can even be trained to respond to simple commands or walk on a leash. Their calm temperament, combined with their social needs and relatively easy care, makes guinea pigs a popular choice as pets for those looking for a gentle and interactive animal companion.

### Habitat Setup

- **Cage Size:** A minimum of 7.5 square feet for one guinea pig. For two guinea pigs, the cage should be at least 10.5 square feet. Larger cages are better for space and exercise.
- **Bedding:** Use soft bedding like fleece or paper-based bedding (avoid cedar or pine as they are harmful to guinea pigs). Change bedding regularly to maintain hygiene.
- **Temperature:** Guinea pigs prefer cool, dry environments (around 65-75°F or 18-24°C). Keep them away from direct sunlight and drafts.
- **Hideaway:** Provide a hideaway or small house for them to feel safe and secure.

### Diet and Nutrition

- **Hay:** Hay should make up the majority of your guinea pig's diet (about 80%). Offer fresh hay like Timothy hay daily, as it helps with digestion and teeth grinding.
- **Fresh Vegetables:** Offer a variety of fresh vegetables daily. Good choices include bell peppers, leafy greens (like spinach, kale, and romaine lettuce), carrots, and cucumber.

- **Vitamin C:** Guinea pigs cannot produce their own vitamin C, so it's essential to provide a source through fresh vegetables (especially bell peppers) or vitamin C supplements.
- **Pellets:** Provide high-quality guinea pig pellets, but avoid those with added sugars or seeds.
- **Water:** Ensure fresh water is available at all times. Use a bottle with a sipper tube to keep water clean.

## Health Care

- **Teeth:** Guinea pigs have constantly growing teeth, so they need to chew on hay, wooden toys, or untreated branches to keep them trimmed.
- **Nails:** Trim your guinea pig's nails every few weeks to prevent overgrowth.
- **Bathing:** Guinea pigs don't need frequent baths. Only bathe them if they get dirty or have a health issue. Use a guinea pig-safe shampoo.
- **Signs of Illness:** Watch for signs such as lethargy, reduced eating or drinking, weight loss, or abnormal feces. If any of these occur, consult a veterinarian, preferably one with experience in guinea pig care.
- **Regular Vet Checkups:** Guinea pigs should see a vet annually for a health checkup and to monitor for common issues like dental problems or respiratory infections.

## Social Needs

- **Companionship:** Guinea pigs are social animals and thrive in pairs or small groups. They should never be kept alone for extended periods. If you have only one guinea pig, make sure to spend plenty of time with it.
- **Playtime:** Allow your guinea pig time outside of the cage in a safe, guinea pig-proofed area. Provide them with toys such as tunnels, chew toys, and balls.
- **Bonding:** If introducing guinea pigs, make sure they are introduced slowly and carefully to avoid territorial behavior.

## Exercise and Mental Stimulation

- **Floor Time:** Guinea pigs love to explore, so offer them a safe space outside of their cage for floor time.
- **Toys:** Provide toys for them to chew on, tunnels to run through, and objects to push or explore. This helps keep them mentally stimulated.
- **Hide and Seek:** Use cardboard boxes or small shelters where they can hide and explore.

## Grooming

- **Brushing:** Short-haired guinea pigs need brushing about once a week to remove loose fur. Long-haired guinea pigs require more frequent brushing to prevent tangles.
- **Skin and Coat Health:** Keep an eye on your guinea pig's coat for signs of parasites (e.g., mites, lice) or infections. Any signs of hair loss, scabs, or excessive itching should be checked by a vet.

## Guinea Pig Behavior and Communication

- **Vocalization:** Guinea pigs communicate with various sounds. Common sounds include:
  - **Wheeking:** A high-pitched sound, often when they are hungry or excited.
  - **Purring:** A contented sound when they're happy or relaxed.
  - **Chutting:** A soft, rapid sound, indicating curiosity.
  - **Teeth Chattering:** A warning sound when they feel threatened or agitated.
- **Body Language:** Guinea pigs use body language to communicate. For example, when they flop over onto their sides, they are often relaxed and content.

## Common Guinea Pig Health Issues

- **Obesity:** Overfeeding and lack of exercise can lead to obesity. Avoid sugary treats and offer healthy veggies instead.
- **Dental Issues:** Ensure they have proper chew toys to help with teeth maintenance.
- **Urinary Problems:** Guinea pigs can develop bladder stones. Provide plenty of fresh water and maintain a healthy diet.

## Life Expectancy

- Guinea pigs typically live between 5 to 7 years, though some can live longer with proper care.