

4-H CAVY PROJECT HEALTH SUPPLEMENT



Publication No. 4H369D

4-H Veterinary Science project members investigate the normal health of several animal species. It is important that you become familiar with the normal health of your project animals so that you can recognize when one of your animals isn't well.

This cavy project health supplement should acquaint you with the basic guinea pig common health characteristics.

Think about your sow or boar guinea pig. If it is alert, on the move, and likes to chew, it is probably quite normal. You are important to your guinea pig because it's your job to keep it well and to know when it needs veterinary care.

Recognition of the following normal characteristics will help you and your veterinarian work as a team to keep your guinea pig in good health.

You should keep a record of any abnormalities which do occur. This record will be important as a case history when your veterinarian begins to formulate a diagnosis. You can create your own chart or use Wisconsin 4-H Publication No. 4H369A.

Your guinea pig's **attitude** is a characteristic with which only you are familiar. An abrupt or gradual change in your animal's behavior may be an indication of sickness. Does your guinea pig whistle when you open the refrigerator door? If they normally anticipate lettuce or carrots, a change in this behavior must have a reason. Try to find the cause.

Your guinea pig's **stance** is quite characteristic. Their short legs keep them low to the ground, although they may frequently stand on their hind legs to reach for food or water bottle.

The normal **movement** is a rapid scurrying about the cage. If your guinea pig sits in one spot without moving for a long time, they could be hurt or sick.

Keep track of your guinea pig's **weight**. Normal weight varies with age and pregnancy. Most adult guinea pigs weigh about two pounds. You should be concerned about a sudden or gradual weight loss.

The **normal hair coat** depends on the variety of guinea pig, nutrition, disease, and age. The English variety normally has the shortest hair coat, while the Peruvian has long flowing hair when properly cared for. Yes, you do have to groom a Peruvian guinea pig! The Abyssinian has an intermediate hair coat with swirling cowlicks. All come in an array of colors, and all should be shiny, clean, and silky-smooth. A rough coat or hair loss in clumps is abnormal. You might suspect lice or mites. Some shedding is expected. Normal baby guinea pigs have hair when they are born!

Skin and mucous membranes (color and condition) are important indicators. Normal skin is soft, velvety, and pliable like elastic. The membranes which line all body openings should be moist and pink. If these are abnormal you might suspect dehydration or anemia.

Because you clean your pet's cage frequently, one of the most obvious characteristics to notice is **bodily discharges**. Fecal droppings should be firm, dry, and a little larger than rice grains. Diarrhea is often a sign of improper feeding, microorganism infection, or stress.

If your guinea pig doesn't seem to be feeling well, you might want to check their temperature. Clean a small rectal thermometer thoroughly and shake it down well below the normal range of 102.1° F. Lubricate it with KY or petroleum jelly. Be sure your pet is restrained properly. Insert the thermometer gently into the rectum and remove after one minute. Then read and record the temperature.

When you contact your veterinarian, be prepared with a complete report of all the signs you have noticed.

Practice recognizing common health characteristics on your guinea pig everyday.

If you'd like further information on animal health, join the 4-H Veterinary Science project. You may use your guinea pig as a project animal.

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