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Chinchilla Care and Facts

Stats:

Chinchillas are native to the Andes Mountains in South America. In the wild, they live in burrows and rock crevices.

Chinchillas are intelligent and active. They are affectionate, playful animals that bond quickly to their owners.

Average lifespan is up to 10 years, but a few make it to 20 years.

Chinchilla teeth grow continuously. Chewing hay shortens the teeth.

Males weigh between 400-500 grams, females 400-600 grams.

When frightened, chinchillas may lose a large amount of fur. This is called a fur slip.

Housing:

The bigger the better, as chinchillas require a lot of space. The cage should be large enough to accommodate feeding supplies, hide boxes, toys, and allow plenty of room to move around. Chinchilla urine is high in ammonia, which is irritating to the lungs, so they need to be able to move away from where they urinate. Caging should be tall enough to allow them to jump and climb.

The cage should have multiple levels.

Use solid bottom cages with wire sides for ventilation. Cover the cage bottom with several inches of Carefresh (crumbled soft paper).

Dust baths are necessary to counterbalance their naturally oily skin and to maintain beautiful soft fur.

Commercial or volcanic dust baths should be offered several times per week for 20-30 minutes.

Temperature range needs to be 65-80°F. The combined temperature and humidity must always be below 150.

Thoroughly clean the cage and change the substrate 1-2 times weekly.

Aromatic cedar and pine shavings are not recommended. They contain resins that may be irritating to the skin and lungs of chinchillas.

Never put a cage in direct sunlight or drafty area.

Diet:

Feed an unlimited amount of Timothy hay.

Pellets are not part of the natural diet. They do not provide the long-stem fiber needed for intestinal health or tooth maintenance, and can lead to obesity. If you choose to feed pellets, use Timothy based pellets and limit to 1-2 Tbsp per day.

It is not recommended to feed alfalfa hay or pellets. Alfalfa is high in fat and calcium, which can predispose your chinchilla to certain diseases.

Offer fresh, clean water daily in a water bottle with a sipper tube.

Sweet treats, fruit, and seeds are unhealthy and can lead to digestive problems and obesity, even when given in small amounts.

Common Medical Problems:

Obesity - Prevent with proper diet and exercise.

Dental disease (infection, overgrown teeth, sharp points on teeth) - Causes include improper diet, genetics, and trauma. Signs include decreased appetite, drooling, grinding teeth, and eye or nasal discharge.

Gastrointestinal stasis (decreased motility of stomach and intestinal contents through system) - Signs include decreased appetite, decreased fecal production, hunched posture, distended abdomen, and lethargy. Prompt medical attention is required.

Diarrhea - Causes include bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration, weight loss, and electrolyte imbalances.

Heat Stroke - Chinchillas are extremely susceptible to this. Signs include being in a hot environment, salivating, shallow breathing, and lethargy.

Physical examinations are recommended every 12 months.