GUINEA PIG CARE GUIDE

A Quick Reference for Families

Guinea Pigs & Families

- Guinea pigs are generally docile and respond well to frequent, gentle handling.
- When carrying one, support its weight with one hand and keep the other hand over its back.
- Avoid excessive handling when a guinea pig is stressed or in pain.

Housing & Exercise

- Provide at least 7 square feet for one guinea pig; add 2–4 square feet for each additional guinea pig.
- Use a **smooth, solid floor** and provide good ventilation.
- Keep the cage at 65–75°F, away from direct sunlight and drafts.
- Provide more hiding places than guinea pigs in the enclosure.
- Provide daily supervised exercise in a guinea pig–proofed area; do not use exercise wheels.

Bedding & Cleaning

- Use dry paper-based bedding, fleece, or another material without loose fibers or strings.
- ✕ **Avoid** cedar, raw pine, sawdust, and cat litter.
- Spot-clean the cage daily and clean it thoroughly each week.
- Change water and check bottle nozzles often.

Safety

- Remove electrical cords and other chew hazards before supervised floor time.
- Do not house guinea pigs with rabbits because diseases may spread between the species.
- Use a secure top if other pets or small children are a concern.

Diet Essentials

- Provide **unlimited** timothy or other low-calcium grass hay.
- Offer a smaller amount of commercial, high-fiber, timothy-based guinea pig pellets.
- Provide fresh, well-washed leafy greens and vegetables, including foods high in vitamin C.
- Keep fresh, clean water available at all times.
- Make diet changes gradually because sudden changes may cause refusal to eat.

Vitamin C & Foods to Avoid

- Guinea pigs require dietary vitamin C because they cannot produce it themselves.
- Use pellets and vegetables as vitamin C sources; ask your veterinarian whether supplementation is needed.
- Offer fruit only occasionally and in small amounts because it is high in sugar.
- ✕ **Do not feed** oats, seeds, nuts, or dry cereals.
- Do not offer iceberg or head lettuce because it has little nutritional value.

Grooming & Routine Care

- Brush fur weekly; long-haired guinea pigs need regular brushing to prevent matting.
- Trim nails every few weeks to prevent overgrowth.
- Bathe only when the coat is dirty or matted, using shampoo made for small animals.
- Avoid getting water in the eyes or ears, and rinse and dry thoroughly.

Health & Veterinary Care

- Use a veterinarian **experienced with guinea pigs**.
- Schedule a routine veterinary examination at least once a year.
- Guinea pigs do not need vaccinations.
- Monitor appetite and weight because guinea pigs may hide illness until they are very sick.

Seek Veterinary Care

- See a veterinarian promptly for loss of appetite or weight, diarrhea, breathing difficulty, low energy, abnormal walking, or a swollen belly.
- Eye or nose discharge, drooling, overgrown teeth, jaw swelling, bloody urine, hair loss, sores, or head tilt also need veterinary attention.
- ✕ Open-mouth breathing requires **immediate veterinary evaluation**.

FINAL REMINDER

Guinea pigs need roomy housing, unlimited grass hay, daily vitamin C sources, gentle handling, and prompt veterinary care.

Veterinary sources: MSD Veterinary Manual: Providing a Home for a Guinea Pig • MSD Veterinary Manual: Routine Care of Guinea Pigs • MSD Veterinary Manual: Housing and Nutrition of Guinea Pigs • VCA Animal Hospitals: Owning Guinea Pigs • VCA Animal Hospitals: Feeding Guinea Pigs • VCA Animal Hospitals: Health Problems in Guinea Pigs •

This guide is educational and does not replace advice or examination by a veterinarian.