



Guinea pig healthcare

Guinea pigs are very social animals and make great pets, but they have specific requirements that need to be fulfilled to ensure a long and happy life.

DIET

Guinea pigs are unable to produce vitamin C themselves so they require a balanced diet that provides it. It is always worth supplementing it in sick animals..

A balanced diet will be based on:

- Good quality and unlimited hay (limiting alfalfa hay to young cavies, pregnant or nursing females or malnourised adults due to its high content of calcium that could lead to bladder stones).
- Green vegetables and herbs.
- Concentrates: it is always better to feed pelleted food to prevent selective feeding.
- Try to limit fruit and provide it only occasionally and in small amounts as a treat.



COMPANIONSHIP

Guinea pigs are very social animals that prefer living in groups. It is best to keep animals of the same sex that have grown up together. Even then males might start fighting due to dominance problems. In these cases increasing the size of the cage and increasing food and water resources might improve the situation. If not, castration can sometimes reduce aggressive behaviours but it needs to be done as soon as possible as these can become a learned behaviour and therefore a habit. If keeping males and females together it will be advisable to castrate the males (spaying a female is more invasive and risky) as they can start breeding from very early ages.

HOUSING

The cage must be at least 0.9 m² per guinea pig and 30 cm high, and solid flooring is always best as wires can cause damage to their legs. Absorbable bedding material will be necessary (wood shavings, shredded paper) but straw is definitely contraindicated as it can damage their eyes and genital tract.

Indoor housing will be essential during extreme weather conditions (freezing days in winter or very hot days in summer) but an outdoor cage will be essential as well, to ensure exercise and grazing.

They will need places to hide as they are very nervous animals, and toys to keep them entertained.

Always ensure they are protected from predators such as birds, cats.





SIGNS OF PAIN IN GUINEA PIGS

- Lack of appetite
- Changes in toileting
- Excess water consumption
- Heavy breathing
- Squealing
- Flinching
- Pressing his/her tummy on the floor
- Sunken eyes
- Weight loss
- Fitting episodes
- Lameness
- Scaly coat
- Change in behaviour
- Pulling his/her own hair out.
- Drooling



GUINEA PIGS ARE NOT SMALL RABBITS!!!

Guinea pigs have different needs to rabbits and behave and communicate in a different way too. Keeping them together can affect them emotionally as they won't be able to understand each other and it would be a health risk as rabbits can carry diseases that guinea pigs are extremely sensitive to. Due to different nutritional needs guinea pigs should never be fed rabbit food either.

COMMON DISEASES

BLADDER INFECTIONS AND STONES

One of the signs is blood coming out with the urine. Investigation might include xrays, scans and urine examination...If left untreated it can be fatal.

DENTAL PROBLEMS

This can affect the front or back teeth and is best checked by a vet, as access to the back teeth is not easy without the appropriate tools.

SORES ON FEET

Keeping a dry and clean cage is the best way to avoid this problem. Avoiding wired flooring is also essential. Obesity is a risk factor.

HEAT STROKE

Guinea pigs are very sensitive to high temperatures and humidity.



DIARRHOEA

Can be fatal if left untreated. Sudden changes in the diet, stress, inappropriate food or other illnesses can cause it.

OVARIAN CYSTS

Very common. Xrays and scans may need to be carried out to confirm, and most times neutering to remove the ovaries is the treatment of choice.

SCURVY

Guinea pigs can't produce vitamin C so they depend on the content of it in their diet. A lack of it can cause lameness, joint swelling, dermatitis, weight loss. Cheap or inappropriate food may not have enough in it.

PARASITES

Very common. Can be treated with a spot on/ injection by your vet.