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How to Raise a Healthy Guinea Pig
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Food and Water

Every Guinea Pig (also known as a “cavy”) needs daily:

Vitamin C
Fresh Water
Quality Pellets
Unlimited Grass Hay
Fresh Vegetables

VITAMIN C: Guinea pigs cannot manufacture their own vitamin C and require 10 to 30 mg/kg daily to prevent scurvy. While many guinea pigs receive adequate vitamin C from fresh vegetables and pellets, you may wish to ensure your cavy gets adequate vitamin C by giving a quarter of a 100 mg chewable or plain vitamin C tablet, or provide a small amount of liquid vitamin C drops to each cavy. Young, ill, nursing and pregnant animals require extra vitamin C. **Do not add vitamin C to the water.** Water is vital to good health but because vitamin C changes the flavor, they may drink less. Also, ascorbic acid degrades rapidly once added to water. Some cavies drink a lot and some very little, so it is impossible to know how much vitamin C your pet is actually getting.

WATER: Fresh, cold water, changed daily, (usually provided in a drip bottle to prevent contamination) should always be available. Avoid distilled water. Avoid water high in minerals, especially if high in calcium. Do not put vitamins or medications in the water.

PELLETS: Plain dye free high quality guinea pig pellets (mixes with nuts are considered too rich), formulated with Vitamin C can be provided in a small heavy ceramic bowl to prevent tipping. Bowls should be cleaned daily. Each cavy will eat approximately 1/8 cup of pellets a day when also fed adequate hay and fresh vegetables. Purchase pellets in a small quantities and store in a dry

cool dark place to preserve the potency of the Vitamin C (look for a pellet with an expiration date to check for freshness). Look for a pellet that uses stabilized Vitamin C and has a “Best if Used By” date to ensure quality. Avoid pellets that are animal byproducts and those whose primary ingredient is corn.

Most cavy pellets are alfalfa based. Alfalfa pellets are suitable for young, growing and pregnant cavies. After your cavy is about a year old and fully developed, a timothy based pellet, which provides less calcium, may be a good choice. Two quality timothy based pellets are *Timothy Choice* pellets by KM’s Hayloft and *Cavy Cuisine* by the Oxbow Hay Company.

GRASS HAY: Unlimited high quality, grass hay (timothy and orchard grass are popular) should always be available to each and every guinea pig, no matter what age. Eating the long hay strands keeps their digestive system moving and helps prevent their teeth from over growing. It is usually placed in a wire rack off the floor for cleanliness.

Alfalfa hay can be given to young guinea pigs, pregnant, nursing or malnourished adults. But because of its high calcium content, alfalfa should be reserved as a treat for the average adult cavy. Excess calcium could contribute to the formation of bladder stones in older cavies. Remember that alfalfa is not a replacement for grassy hay, but can be used to supplement the diet of some pigs. And remember, pellets are not a substitute for hay! High quality grass hay should be available for each guinea pig at all times.

VEGETABLES: Small amounts of fresh vegetables (about a cup a day) are an important additional source of Vitamin C and other nutrients. Parsley, romaine lettuce (rather than iceberg, which has less nutritional value and may result in loose

stools if given in excess), a small piece of carrot, tomato, green or red pepper, spinach, and cantaloupe are popular choices. And clean, pesticide-free grass, clover, dandelion greens, corn husks and silk, will be appreciated by your pet. Rinse vegetables thoroughly. Do not feed wilted or spoiled food. Vegetables must be introduced slowly, to avoid digestive upsets. Once introduced, you can supply a variety of them to your pet. Variety is the key to maintaining your pigs' health.

NOT RECOMMENDED IN DIET: Avoid mixes or treats with nuts, seeds, dried fruit and dyed pieces. Do not feed dairy and meat products (cavies are herbivores). Avoid seeds in husks (like sunflower seeds), which can be a choking hazard. Do not feed rabbit pellets.

Housing

Select a smooth bottomed cage (no wire bottom, ramps or shelves on which they can catch their feet). A small covered house or box inside the cage will provide a sense of protection and a place to sleep. If separation from other household pets is not an issue, an open-topped enclosure may allow you to interact with and pet your cavy more easily. Not recommended: Aquariums and plastic tubs are much too small and have poor ventilation. This type of housing isolates the guinea pig from its surroundings by limiting sight, sound and smell.

Size: Provide as large a cage as possible.

Guineapigcages.com makes a compelling case for providing 7 square feet for one cavy, adding 2 to 4 square feet per additional cavy. They offer creative, attractive, and affordable ways to do so. You can visit their webpage for plans and designs. A larger cage will require less frequent cleaning and provide space for play, toys and exercise. Many pet owners report happy pigs when introduced to their new, spacious living quarters. And more space makes "getting along" easier for multiple pig households. In the U.S. you can purchase a C&C Cage Kit online, if you'd like the planning done for you. Part of the cost helps support the Guineapigcages website. The author has given her three pigs free run of a whole room and includes photos and a description of their living arrangements.

Location: Choose a bright draft-free room with a stable temperature range between 65 and 75 degrees F (18 to 24 degrees C), out of direct sunlight, situated close to household activities. The more your guinea pigs are part of your daily lives, the happier you will both be. Avoid bedrooms: allergies may develop in families

prone to problems when you or your child sleeps in the same room that houses your pets. Do not house cavies outside! Temperature fluctuations can be very hard on your guinea pigs. Predators sometimes break into cages. A guinea pig inside will receive better care as you will catch healthy problems more quickly.

BEDDING: Cover the cage floor with 1 to 2 inches of Care FRESH or Yesterday's News (paper products), aspen shavings, or kiln-dried pine. Frequent changing (every 3 to 4 days or less) will prevent odors and promote good healthy. Some pet owners purchase high quality soft grass hay by the bale and cover the absorbent shavings with an inch or two of it. Any hay that is wet should be removed daily. Readily available hay will give them something to chew on. And a pig who is eating is a happy pig. Not recommended: Cedar and raw pin (not kiln-dried) shavings contain aromatic oils (phenols) which can contribute to respiratory problems. Sawdust (small particles may be inhaled) and cat litter (which a cavy may eat) are also poor choices for bedding.

NECESSARY ACCESSORIES: Provide a water bottle and a small, heavy untipable dish for pellets.

OPTIONAL ACCESSORIES: A hayrack, hammock, cat toys with bells, Pigloo, or a non toxic hanging bird toy. You may also wish to purchase a cat carrier for bringing home your pet and transport to the veterinarian.



Please call the office if you have a question or problem. Above all, enjoy your pet, give him or her your love and affection; they deserve it and will repay you with years of companionship and enjoyment.