



Caring for Your Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs can be the most endearing and wonderful family pets. They may live 5 to 7 years or more, so the decision to bring one into your home must be made carefully. Your pet will depend on you for food, water, medical care, and companionship.

This outline of how to care for your cavy (the proper name for a guinea pig) will help your pet have a healthy long life.

TAMING YOUR NEW PET

On first arriving home, your pet will appreciate being left alone for a day to adjust to the new environment. Although new cavies may not like to be picked up and will race around the cage to avoid it, bribery with enticing veggies will help win them over and with patience most cavies will become loving pets who enjoy being cuddled. Cavies are easily startled, so use a quiet voice and slow movements to help keep them calm. Use a towel to catch droppings while holding them on your lap. When lifting and carrying your cavy, support the entire body with two hands.

Cavies are easily injured if dropped, and may nip or bite if not properly handled. Children over the age of six can help with the care and feeding of these fabulous family pets.

****Small children should be supervised while they are handling a guinea pig. They should NOT be allowed to take it out of the cage by themselves or to carry it around.***

HOUSING

Bigger is better! A larger cage requires less frequent cleaning and provides space for play, toys, and exercise. Spacious cages made of wire cubes and Coroplast sheets are superior to small manufactured cages, whose wire bottoms, wire ramps, and shelves can injure a guinea pig's feet and legs. See www.cavycages.com. If separation from other household pets is not an issue, an open-topped enclosure will allow you to pet and interact with your cavy more easily.

WARNING: *Never leave a guinea pig unattended in the presence of a dog, cat, ferret or any other predatory animal.*

SIZE: Minimum 7 square feet for one cavy. For each additional cavy add at least 1 square foot (preferably 2).

NOT RECOMMENDED: *Aquariums and plastic tubs have poor ventilation and isolate your pet from its surroundings by limiting sight, sound, and smell.*

BEDDING: Cover the cage floor with 1 to 2 inches of CareFRESH® or Yesterday's News® (paper products), aspen shavings, or kiln-dried pine shavings. Frequent changing (every 3 or 4 days or less) will prevent odors and help keep your cavy healthy. Fleece animal bedding is another alternative. Visit www.guinealynx.info for more ideas.

NOT RECOMMENDED: *Cedar shavings contain aromatic oils (phenols) which can contribute to respiratory problems. Sawdust (too dusty), corncob bedding (which often molds), and clay cat litter are also poor choices for bedding.*

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, and situated close to household activities.

ACCESSORIES: Water bottle, heavy small untipplable dish for pellets, a small covered box or Pigloo for sleeping, and a cat carrier for transport to the vet and for traveling.

Did you Know?

Guinea pigs are native to South America.

Guinea pigs love to run and play.

Penicillin is toxic to guinea pigs.

Guinea pigs can jump 12 inches.

Guinea pigs can purr.

All pigs have bald patches behind their ears.

DIET *Every cavy needs daily:*

VITAMIN C: Cavies cannot manufacture their own vitamin C and require 10 to 30 mg daily to prevent scurvy. You can give a quarter tablet of a 100 mg chewable or plain vitamin C, or provide a small amount of liquid drops to each cavy.

FRESH COLD WATER in a drip bottle, changed daily. Do not add vitamins or medications to the water.

PLAIN HIGH QUALITY GUINEA PIG PELLETS formulated with vitamin C (approximately 1/4 cup of pellets daily). Purchase pellets in small quantities and store in a cool, dry, and dark place to preserve the potency of the vitamin C (check the expiration date to assure freshness).

UNLIMITED HIGH QUALITY GRASS HAY (timothy or orchard grass) to keep their digestive system running smoothly and give their teeth a good workout. Alfalfa hay is fine for pregnant, nursing, and young cavies or malnourished adults, but because of high calcium content it should be reserved as a treat for the average adult cavy. Excess calcium could contribute to the formation of bladder stones.

VEGETABLES: Serve small amounts of fresh vegetables (about a cup a day) as an additional source of vitamin C and other nutrients. Parsley, romaine and leaf lettuce, a small piece of carrot, tomato, green or red pepper, spinach, and cantaloupe are popular choices. Your pet will also appreciate clean, pesticide-free grass, clover, dandelion greens, corn husks and silk. Introduce new vegetables gradually. Once introduced, provide a variety daily to help maintain good health.

OPTIONAL: Unsweetened, pure cranberry juice is an excellent source of vitamin C and can help prevent urinary tract infections. Dilute juice with water and change once or twice daily to prevent spoilage.

NOT RECOMMENDED: *No mixes or treats containing nuts, seeds, dried fruit, sugar, corn syrup, or dyed pieces. No dairy or meat products (cavies are herbivores). No rabbit pellets (they contain no vitamin C and may include antibiotics dangerous to cavies). No seeds in husks (a choking hazard). No multivitamins (this can result in toxic overdose of vitamins other than C). Avoid cruciferous vegetables like cabbage, collards, bok choy, and broccoli (they may cause gas and are best offered sparingly or not at all). Avoid iceberg lettuce (too much may result in loose stools).*

Looking for a Guinea Pig? Choose to Adopt!

Did you Know?

Males are boars, females are sows, and babies are pups.

Sows can get pregnant as young as 4 weeks old.

Boars are sexually mature at 3½ weeks of age.

Sows can be impregnated within minutes of giving birth.

Guinea pigs have 4 toes on their front feet and 3 toes on their hind feet.

The term for bucking and throwing themselves into the air when happy is "popcorning".

Their front teeth and molars grow continuously.

FLOOR TIME

Cavies need daily exercise. Select an enclosed space with an easily cleaned floor such as a bathroom or kitchen (beware of electric cords and other hazards). Brown paper bags with the lip folded over for stability and small boxes with holes cut in the sides work well as hiding spots. Young cavies love racing through obstacle courses of PVC pipe fittings, ferret tubes, bricks etc. Most cavies enjoy chewing on the inner cardboard tubes of toilet paper or paper towel rolls (slit length-wise for safety). Toilet paper rolls stuffed with hay make good toys for cage or floor time. Some cavies will toss and roll cat toys with bells.

NOT RECOMMENDED: *Exercise wheels or balls may cause injury to a guinea pig's spine, legs, or feet.*

RECOMMENDED READING: A good book on cavy care will help to answer questions about your pet. Visit your local library to see what they have to offer but keep in mind that even new books can include outdated or inappropriate advice. Do some research and get online for the most current information and check www.guinealynx.info/reviews.html for more ideas.

Your new cavy will be a fascinating and wonderful pet.

We are happy to share our lives with our own cavies and wouldn't have it any other way!



GROOMING

BATHING: Long haired cavies are more likely to need the occasional bath than short haired ones. A shampoo formulated especially for kittens will help avoid drying their skin. Use a shallow bowl of water and dry thoroughly before returning them to their home.

CLIPPING TOENAILS: Monthly clippings are a necessary activity. A common fingernail clipper trims toenails well. The smaller opening prevents accidentally clipping a toe. Avoid cutting into the "quick", the living part of the nail. A light shone from beneath dark colored nails may help locate the quick if it is hard to see. Use a styptic pencil to stop the bleeding if you cut the nail too short.

COMBING: A metal greyhound comb gets down to the base of the hairs of most coats. Daily combing will help remove some of the loose hair and lessen shedding.

ONE PIG OR TWO?

Cavies are social herd animals that thrive in each other's company. A pair of same sex cavies (to avoid pregnancy and its many complications) will be brighter, happier animals than a single cavy.

COMPATIBILITY: It is a myth that two male guinea pigs will always fight. How well two cavies get along depends on their personalities rather than their gender. The vast majority will be delighted to have a cage companion. The easiest match is usually between two babies or a baby and an adult, but adults can be paired up successfully as well. Introduce cavies in a neutral, open area. Watch carefully for an hour or so. If they are getting along they can be moved to a freshly cleaned cage (the larger, the better, as it will improve the odds of making a successful pairing). Monitor for another hour or so, making sure they continue to get along. Immediately separate fighting guinea pigs with a towel to avoid being bitten.

QUARANTINE: Quarantine any new cavy for 2 to 3 weeks behind closed doors. Handle the newcomer after caring for any resident cavy, washing hands and arms well and changing your shirt (or wear a smock) following any physical contact to help ensure infection is not passed from one cavy to the other.

RAISING A HEALTHY CAVY

So that your cavy will live a long healthy life, find a cavy-knowledgeable vet (exotics veterinarian) to provide veterinary care. A wellness check will familiarize the vet with your pet and give you a chance to ask questions. The vet can check for parasites, show you how to trim the nails, make sure that the teeth are in good shape and that the cavy is in good health. The best way to monitor your cavy's health is to weigh once a week using a kitchen scale. Keep a chart! Often the first sign of illness is weight loss. A chart will alert you to any gradual weight loss giving you an opportunity to get medical help early, when many illnesses are most effectively treated.

THINGS TO WATCH FOR: If your cavy shows any of these signs, see a vet immediately: refusal to eat or drink; lethargy; labored breathing; wheezing; sneezing; crusty eyes; dull and/or receding eyes; rough or puffed up coat; hunched posture; diarrhea; blood in urine; limping; loss of balance; head tilt; excessive scratching; or hair loss. Be observant.

Unusual behavior (like sitting with its face in a corner and being slow to respond to you) could also be reason for alarm. When a cavy is ill, it can go downhill very quickly. Prompt, competent veterinary care can be crucial to saving the life of an ill cavy.

By the time a cavy shows signs of illness, it is often seriously ill. For this reason, an adult needs to be involved in the daily care of any guinea pig. Most bacterial infections can be cured in the early stages with a course of cavy-safe antibiotics. Don't be afraid to call your vet if you have any concerns.

WARNING: *Penicillin-based drugs (like amoxicillin) are deadly to cavies. Make sure your vet does not prescribe these drugs. If you are not sure whether the prescribed drugs are safe, ask. Because Baytril (an otherwise excellent broad spectrum antibiotic) can interfere with growth, it should be given to baby cavies only as a last resort..*

Find more information on care and medical issues at:

www.guinealynx.info

This pamphlet may be downloaded and distributed without cost upon e-mail notification to:

pamphlet@guinealynx.info

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