



Guinea Pig Wellness

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The Standard of
Veterinary Excellence

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Guinea Pigs as Pets

Guinea pigs are popular pets for many reasons. They are docile and friendly, and once tamed; they seem to enjoy interaction with their owners. They make ideal first pets for older children, because they are easy to care for and rarely bite.

A guinea pig does not require a lot of space, so it is an ideal pet for a child's bedroom or for a person living in an apartment. The guinea pig's life span of 5-7 years is longer than that of smaller rodents such as hamsters, gerbils, rats, and mice.

- Another name for the guinea pig is "cavy" from its scientific name, *Cavia porcellus*.
- Guinea pigs are rodents from South America, which were initially tamed by the Incas of Peru.
- The most common varieties of guinea pigs found in pet stores today are the English shorthaired, the Peruvian longhaired, and the Abyssinian rough haired.
- Newer strains of longhaired cavies include the smooth-coated Silkies and the rough-haired Woolies.
- Many guinea pigs kept as pets are actually "mixed breeds." Guinea pigs can be found in numerous colors and color combinations.



The guinea pig's length of pregnancy of 59-72 days is similar to that of dogs and cats rather than the other members of the rodent family (e.g., rats, mice, hamsters, and gerbils) that typically have a 21-to-28 day gestation period. This longer period results in well-developed offspring that have open eyes and full hair coats when born and eat solid food within several days. Any guinea pig pregnancy warrants a visit to us for an exam and discussion on birthing.

Guinea pigs also become sexually mature at an early age and it is suggested that males and females be separated or neutered by the time they are 12 weeks old in order to prevent reproduction. Also, after about eight months of age the female guinea pig's pelvic bones become more tightly fused and if she has not had a litter by that time, producing young can be more of a problem. Guinea pigs give birth not to a large litter of tiny immature young (as the rat or mouse does), but to between two and four fully developed well-furred offspring. These large babies have a hard time getting through the pelvic canal unless the mother's pelvic bones are relatively immature and malleable.

Feeding Your Pet Guinea Pig



Commercial guinea pig pellets such as Oxbow Animal Health Essentials Cavy Cuisine Adult Guinea Pig Food are an excellent choice. When fed with Oxbow grass hays and treats, Cavy Cuisine provides complete stabilized nutrition. Feed your guinea pig twice daily, in the morning and in the evening.

We also recommend offering small amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables every day. Half a handful of veggies and a slice of fresh fruit per pig is plenty. Always make sure to clean up any leftover fresh food before it spoils. You'll also

need to make timothy grass hay available at all times. It's great for the digestive system, and will also satisfy your pet's need to gnaw.

Unlike other animals, guinea pigs cannot manufacture Vitamin C, so you'll need to ensure that your piggie receives enough of this essential nutrient every day. Oxbow Animal Health makes an excellent supplement, Daily C, which is a tablet form of vitamin C. This will eliminate the guesswork when it comes to making sure that your piggie is receiving a guaranteed, stabilized amount of vitamin C.

Here is a list of fruits and vegetables that guinea pigs love and that give them the best nutritional benefits. Fruits are high in sugar so it's best to use them sparingly as treats. Also, be sure to avoid any sudden major changes in diet until you know how your guinea pig's tummy reacts to new foods:

- Red Pepper (or green/yellow pepper. Red has the highest vitamin C concentration)
- Carrots - both the root and the green tops are perfectly safe for your guinea pig.
- Apples - just make sure they don't have any seeds
- Leafy greens like red lettuce, romaine, Boston lettuce
- Cucumbers
- Green beans
- Grapes
- Bananas
- Dandelion greens
- Oranges or clementines
- Spinach
- Cilantro
- Dandelion greens
- Parsley - either curly or flat

NEVER feed your Guinea Pig the following:

- Any type of cabbage
- Cauliflower
- Potato peelings
- Raw, hard kidney beans, split peas, pinto beans, etc.
- Shelled nuts or seeds, particularly things like sunflower seeds or 'bird seed' type mixes, pumpkin seeds, peanuts, etc.
- Rhubarb
- Any type of meat or fish.
- Dairy Products - while many stores will offer 'yogurt drops' and other 'treats', dairy is not healthy to feed and can actually cause problems. Feed natural treats like veggies instead of store brand treats.
- Chocolate, coffee or other caffeine-containing products.
- Alcohol
- Cookies/bread

Fresh, clean water should be available at all times. Use an inverted bottle with a drinking tube, and change the water daily.

Housing Your Pet Guinea Pig



If you are going to house your guinea pig in a cage please get the largest cage possible. Solid bottom ones are best as wire floors can irritate delicate piggie feet. Plastic-bottom “tub cages” with wire tops also make good homes. Never use a glass aquarium, due to the poor ventilation that it provides.

Always keep the cage indoors away from drafts and extreme temperatures, as guinea pigs are very susceptible to heatstroke.

They prefer 60 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit with regards to temperature.

Line the bottom of the cage with aspen or hardwood shavings or some other form of safe bedding, such as grass hay or shredded paper. Do not use cedar or pine chips—the oils they contain can be dangerous.

If you want to give your piggie more space to live in, consider building a cage using plastic grids or metal x-pens. There are plenty of websites out there that will provide you with directions on how to easily construct a guinea pig “space”. BlueStone Commerce

(<http://bluestonecages.com/>) provides excellent pictures and suggestions on how to build a fabulous enclosure.

Guinea pigs love to hide when they play, so be sure to place cardboard tubes or timothy hay bungalows in the enclosure for this purpose. Plastic pipes and flower pots are good, too, and bricks and rocks for climbing will be much appreciated. All guinea pigs want a cave for sleeping and resting, so provide a medium-sized flower pot, covered sleeping box, or plastic igloo. Caution, some guinea pigs are chewers, especially on plastic objects, so if you have one who likes to gnaw, you may need to remove the igloo and replace it with a timothy grass bungalow.



Your Guinea Pig's Health

- Guinea pigs are masters at hiding signs of pain or illness so they may be suffering a great deal before anything is noticed. A change in the way a guinea pig normally behaves can be an early sign that he is ill or in pain. If a guinea pig is not eating, is quiet or hiding more than usual, he may be sick.
- Signs that a guinea pig may be suffering from stress or fear can include hiding most of the time, chewing cage bars, over-grooming, altered feeding or bathroom habits, over-drinking or playing with the water bottle, sitting hunched, reluctant to move, and repeated circling of his enclosure.
- Get your guinea pig spayed or neutered.
- Feeding your guinea pig the correct diet may help prevent a lot of common diseases such as dental and gut disease and lack of Vitamin C. Check that your guinea pig is eating every day and that he is passing plenty of dry droppings. If your guinea pig's eating or drinking habits change or the number of droppings gets less or stops, call us immediately.
- Front teeth and nails should be checked at least once a week as these can grow quickly. Overgrown or misaligned teeth have to be corrected by one of our veterinarians.
- Bring your guinea pig in for a wellness exam every six months.
- Keep your pig's coat in good condition by grooming him regularly. If you are unsure how to groom ask us. This is especially important in longhaired breeds, which will need daily brushing.

Behavior

- Guinea pigs are prey animals and are generally nervous of new sights, sounds and smells

- Their immediate response to a perceived threat is to freeze (remain still and alert). This freezing behavior can last from a few seconds up to 30 minutes. Afterwards they may flee to a place of safety.
- Guinea pigs will approach strange objects or unfamiliar guinea pigs with a stretched posture, making contact with their whiskers only. This posture allows them to move away rapidly if required.
- Guinea pigs are active up to 20 hours per day and sleep only for short periods of time
- Guinea pigs are not very agile and are poor climbers.
- Guinea pigs are explorers.
- Guinea pigs are highly social animals.
- Guinea pigs have a wide range of vocalizations, which mean different things. For example, during exploration guinea pigs make short 'chutt' or 'putt' sounds, when excited (e.g. when expecting food) or when separated from companion guinea pigs they whistle (or 'wheek') and when seeking or experiencing physical contact they 'purr'.

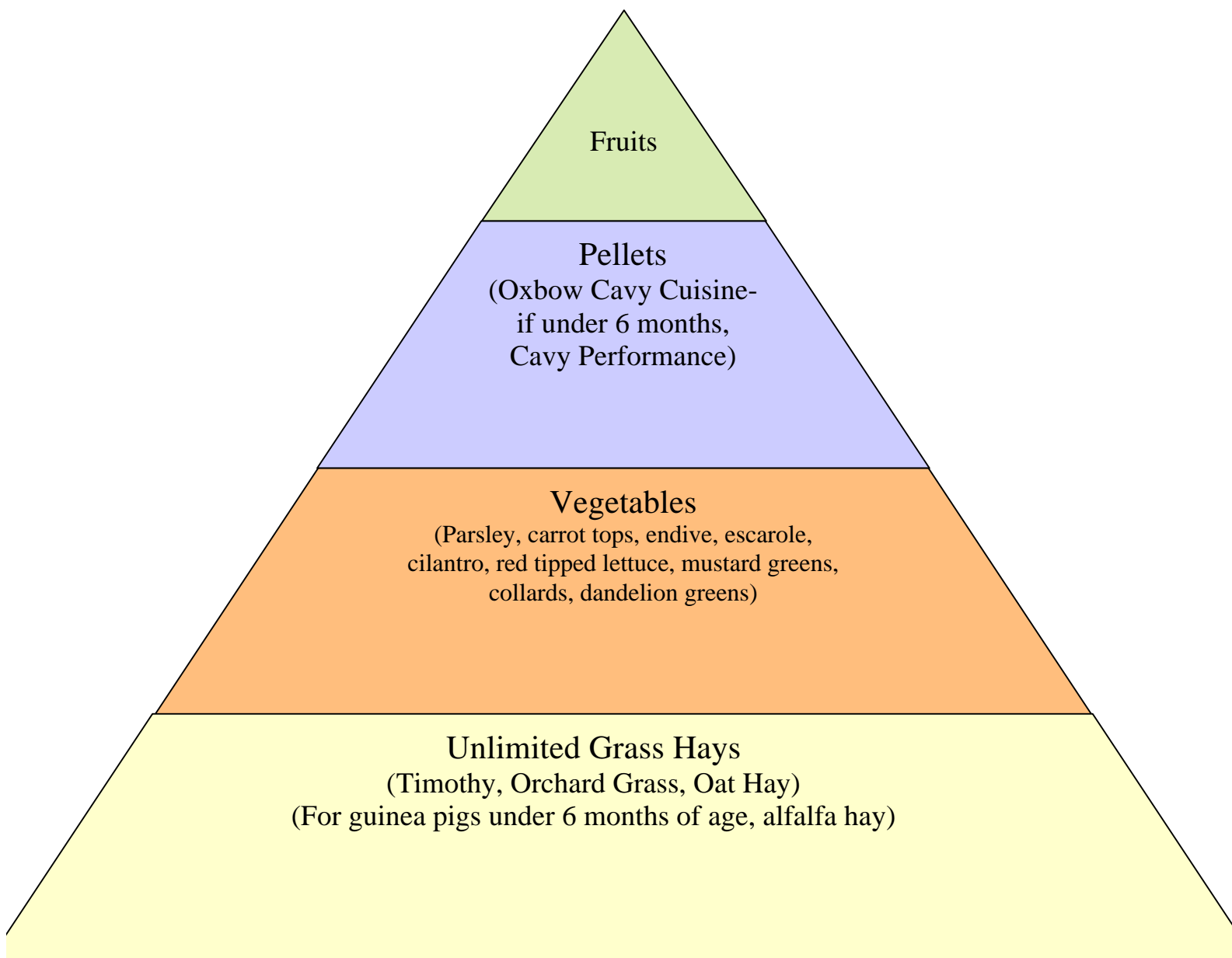


Vitamin Content of Selected Foods

The following chart shows the Vitamin C content in milligrams (mg) of 1-cup portions of selected foods

Item	Vitamin C (mg)
Turnip Greens	260
Mustard Greens	252
Dandelion Greens	200
Kale	192
Brussel Sprouts	173
Parsley	140
Collard Greens	140
Guavas	125
Beet Greens	100
Kohlrabi	100
Strawberries	100
Honeydew Melon	90
Broccoli Florets	87
Spinach	60
Raspberries	60
Rutabaga	52
Orange	50

Guinea Pig Food Pyramid



Definite “No-No’s”- (not to be given at any time)

- ***No chocolate (poisonous)**
- *Cookies
- *Yogurt drops
- *Crackers
- *Breakfast Cereal
- *Pasta
- *Bread
- *Grain (corn, oats, etc.)

Common Exotic Pet

Pesticides – these are a common source of intoxication for domestic pets and exotic pets alike. If your pet spends time outside, it is at risk for exposure to pesticides placed not only in your yard, but also from run-off from adjacent yards or farmland. Herbivorous grazers and reptiles that eat insects from outdoors can ingest the toxins, but sometimes animals may become intoxicated from skin exposure alone. Always be aware of what your house and yard are treated with, as well as that of your neighbors. **DO NOT** allow your pet to graze or hunt if the safety of the food source is in question. If you are treating your pet for any external parasites (such as snake mites) with any of these products, **DO NOT** use them in conjunction with each other, especially products within the same class of chemical.

Always check with us before using any type of pesticides near or around your pet's living area.

Rodenticides are rarely ingested by exotic animals. There are three main classes: vitamin K1 blockers, bromethalin, and vitamin D3 amplifiers. It is important to differentiate between these three types for treatment, so if you suspect that your pet has eaten one of these compounds, please make every effort to bring in the box, or otherwise identify the compound.

Toxic Plants – many household and garden plants can be toxic to animals if eaten in large quantities. While a complete list would be too large for this handout, look up or ask about plants that you purchase for your yard or house, limit pet exposure to unknown plants, and monitor pets while in the back yard. Please note that the seeds of several fruits (apples, apricots, cherries, peaches, plums, and jetberries) contain cyanide, and may be toxic. These should be removed before offering the safe parts of the fruits to your pet. Other toxic plants in the wild may include (but are not limited to) azaleas, rhododendrons, laurel, yew, castor bean plants, sago palms, holly, mistletoe, poinsettia, oleander, foxglove, lily of the valley, any calcium oxalate plant, ivy, tobacco, oak, and marijuana.

Medications – as Paracelsus stated long ago, “Dosage differentiates the poison from the remedy.” Many commonly used medications, including antibiotic, anti-fungal, and anti-parasitic drugs, can be toxic to your pets if given at improper dosage ranges. In addition, individual animals may have allergic reactions to specific classes of medication (these reactions are impossible to predict). Always store medications where all of your pets (and children) cannot reach them. Always give the amount of medication directed by your veterinarian, and call your veterinarian if you have any questions or concerns about a medication, a pet's reaction to a medication, or a dosing regimen.



If you have any questions, please call us at 473-0111