

Warren Woods Veterinary Hospital

29157 Schoenherr Rd., Warren, MI 48088
phone (586) 751-3350 fax (586) 751-3447 website www.wwhcares.com

Basic Guinea Pig Care

General Information:

- Guinea pigs, also called cavies, are members of the rodent family.
- Like other rodents, their teeth are open-rooted and grow continuously throughout their lives.
- Female guinea pigs reach puberty at 2 months of age, males at 3 months.
- Average life span is 5-6 years.
- Although guinea pigs do not require vaccinations, a yearly vet check-up is encouraged.

Housing:

- Cages should be constructed of plastic, metal or wire, and provide good ventilation. A glass fish aquarium has poor ventilation, and should only be used if the bedding is changed very frequently.
- Minimum cage dimensions are 18" x 12" of floor space per adult guinea pig.
- The cage flooring may be mesh, but a solid bottom is preferred to avoid injuries to the feet.
- Newspaper, shredded paper, recycled paper litter, straw, hay and wood stove pellets are all acceptable bedding materials for guinea pigs. Cedar and pine shavings can be toxic and should NOT be used.
- Bedding must be changed quite often (2-3 times per week or more) to prevent the build-up of urine and stool.
- Guinea pigs can get heat stroke, so the cage should be kept out of direct sunlight, in an area where the temperature is 65 to 79°F.
- Guinea pigs enjoy a "hiding box" in the cage, which can be as simple as a cardboard box; often this will double as a chewing area.
- Water bottles must be checked daily for blockages by food materials from the mouth.

Diet:

- A commercial guinea pig pelleted food is recommended. Buy only enough for 1 -2 months at a time, because the pellets can lose vitamins if stored for extended periods.
- Hay is an important part of the guinea pig's diet; this may be grass (timothy) or alfalfa hay and should be available at all times.

■ Guinea pigs require supplementation of vitamin C every day. Tang drink mix or soluble vitamin pills can be added to the drinking water (50 mg per 8 oz. cup); the water must be changed daily to maintain potency.

■ Alternately, vitamin C-rich foods may be added to the diet. Fresh, green leafy vegetables such as kale, parsley, beet greens, broccoli, spinach, romaine lettuce, and carrot tops are all rich in vitamin C. Remove from the cage what has not been eaten after a few hours.

■ Treats such as fruits (banana, apple), rolled oats or dry cereal may be offered in limited amounts. No more than 1-2 tablespoons per day total. (Limit to 1-2 times weekly if dieting.)

■ Any changes to the diet should be done slowly and gradually to reduce intestinal upset.

Common Diseases and Problems:

■ Most diseases of guinea pigs are treatable if detected early.

■ *Malocclusion of the teeth:* causes teeth to over grow. May be genetic, or secondary to trauma, poor diet, or infection. Teeth may develop sharp points that are painful. Symptoms to watch for include decreased appetite, drooling and weight loss. Treatment is periodic tooth-trimming.

■ *Scurvy:* caused by vitamin C deficiency. Symptoms include dull haircoat, poor appetite, diarrhea, and lethargy. Prevention is by adequate dietary vitamin C supplementation.

■ *Respiratory infection/pneumonia:* caused by bacteria or a virus. Symptoms include sneezing, discharge from the eyes and/or nose, poor appetite, and heavy breathing. Oral antibiotics are usually required for treatment.

■ *Hair loss:* may be caused by ringworm, mites, fleas, other parasites or "barbering". Affected guinea pigs should be examined to determine the cause and start treatment.