

Congratulations on your adoption of a guinea pig into your family! Guinea pigs (also commonly known as Cavies) make wonderful family pets and like humans - each develops a unique personality. Guinea pigs are very social and have a wide range of fun calls and chatters. They are naturally prey animals and most likely will be a little skittish around you at first. When you first get your guinea pigs give them a few days to get used to all members of the family before you start to try to hold and play with them. Be patient and allow them time to build trust. Spend time with them every day to let them get used to you. Start by talking to them and then feeding them. Brush them and let them explore their surroundings before you try to handle them.



**HOUSING**

For one guinea pig, the minimum amount of living space should be at least 65 cm by 65 cm space with 30 cm high walls for one guinea pig. The “cage” can be open on top and should be made out of wood, metal or plastic. The floor bottom should be flat, not mesh or wire. Cover the flooring of the “cage” with shavings (aspen or CareFresh are recommended – cedar and pine are not). Place a box or another object (you can buy one or make one out of wood) in the cage so your guinea pig has a hiding/resting place.



Add other interesting paper tubes (the cardboard insert from carpet rolls or plastic pipes work marvelously) and boxes to provide enrichment – change the placement from time to time for variety. Clean out the dirty shavings every day and clean the complete cage at least once a week to make sure their bedding is

dry, clean and odour free. For information on how to build an inexpensive guinea pig habitat out of corrugated plastic go to [www.spca.bc.ca/Educators/habitat.asp](http://www.spca.bc.ca/Educators/habitat.asp).

Guinea pigs like company, so two guinea pigs can live together as long as they are the same sex and have a large enough living space. Never bring a new adult guinea pig into the cage unless they have grown up together. Adult guinea pigs will fight. It is best keep to same sex siblings together from birth.

If you observe your guinea pig chewing on the bars of her cage or exhibiting any unusual repetitive behaviour - this is not normal! Your guinea pig is bored and frustrated. Provide your guinea pig with a more stimulating environment by providing more items to chew on, a larger habitat, more out of cage exercise time or more time socializing with the family.

**FOOD**

Guinea pigs are rodents which means their teeth grow continuously and they need to gnaw and chew to wear down their teeth. Their diet is very important to keep their teeth from overgrowth. Guinea pigs are herbivores meaning they eat only grasses, vegetables and fruit. Like humans, they are unable to produce their own vitamin C so they must get in in their diet. Their daily diet should include:



- Unlimited amounts of fresh Timothy Hay
- ¼ cup of pelleted guinea pig food
- Vegetables & legumes (2 cups a day)
- Fruit (give more vegetables and use fruits as a treat)

Recommended **vegetables** (add one new vegetable to your guinea pig’s diet at a time):

- ⇒ Bok choy
- ⇒ Dandelion flowers & leaves (untreated)
- ⇒ Celery (strings removed)
- ⇒ Spinach\*
- ⇒ Carrots & carrot tops
- ⇒ Herbs (parsley\*, cilantro, basil, mint)
- ⇒ Peppers\*
- ⇒ Kale
- ⇒ Radish tops & sprouts



Recommended **fruits** (dried or fresh)

- ⇒ Pears
- ⇒ Blueberries
- ⇒ Papaya\*
- ⇒ Grapes (no seeds)
- ⇒ Raisins
- ⇒ Orange\*
- ⇒ Apple (no core or seeds)
- ⇒ Plums
- ⇒ Raspberries
- ⇒ Strawberries

*\*High in vitamin C*

Foods not to feed your guinea pig:

- ⇒ Beans
- ⇒ Potatoes
- ⇒ Beets
- ⇒ Avocado
- ⇒ Cabbage
- ⇒ Sweet potato
- ⇒ Corn
- ⇒ Rhubarb
- ⇒ Dairy products
- ⇒ Avoid lettuce (it causes loose stool)

Avoid making any sudden dietary changes. Always introduce new foods in small amounts.

To help wear down their front teeth, also provide wood (e.g., fruit wood or aspen) or cardboard chew items.

**WATER**

Guinea pigs should always have water available to them through a sipper bottle or sturdy bowl. Water must be changed every day and containers should be completely cleaned once a week.

**HANDLING**

Always pick up your guinea pig with two hands, one hand under their bum and the other on their chest. Don't let your guinea pig wander on tabletops or anywhere he can fall off. When holding your guinea pig be gentle, don't squeeze or grab her. Guinea pigs can be scared of humans until they get used to being held.

**GROOMING**

Longer-haired guinea pigs need to have their fur brushed and all guinea pigs need their nails regularly trimmed. You can give your guinea pig a bath if she is smelly, dirty or greasy. Use special shampoo from the vet or pet supply store, and put your guinea pig in the sink or small wash basin. Make sure you keep her face dry and rinse out all of the shampoo by pouring water from a cup all over her body until there is no soap left in her fur. Dry her off with a towel, do not use a blow dryer because the heat can burn their skin.

Nails need to be trimmed every month or as necessary. Consult a vet or knowledgeable person for instructions if hesitant. Care must be taken to avoid cutting the "quick" - the blood vessel in the centre of the nail. In good light this vessel is clearly visible. Always keep a styptic powder (to stop bleeding) close by when cutting nails in case the quick is cut.

**EXERCISE**

Building an enclosure (shown on the previous page) will give your guinea pig room to run around. Enriching the area with tubes and boxes with holes



cut out so they can run through encourages the guinea pigs to be active. You can also allow your guinea pig to run around an enclosed area of your home.

On nice days, your guinea pig will enjoy spending some time outside. Make an outdoor playground by building a grazing pen or A-frame enclosure. Put this on untreated grass and your guinea pigs will enjoy eating the grass and running around. Adding tubes and boxes will make it a real playground for guinea pigs. You can also try using the wire cage top from a cage. Remember, when you're guinea pig is outside always add a box or shelter for hiding and shade.

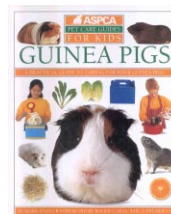
**CAUTION:** During exercise time (indoors or especially outdoors) always keep a watchful eye on your guinea pigs.

**MEDICAL CONCERNS**

Call your veterinarian or take your guinea pig to the vet if you notice her having diarrhea, difficulty in breathing, hair loss, drinking lots of water, not moving around much, not eating or anything else you think is unusual. Injuries due to falls or other accidents should be treated by a veterinarian right away.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

This sheet is meant to provide minimum care guidelines for guinea pigs. For more detailed information contact your vet and consult a guinea pig care book available at book stores, pet shops or from your public library. Look for guides that discuss nutrition, health issues, and guinea pig behaviour. For information and plans on how to build an inexpensive guinea pig habitat, go to [www.spca.bc.ca/Educators/habitat.asp](http://www.spca.bc.ca/Educators/habitat.asp)



Some recommended resources:

Website:

[www.petcarevabeach.com/guinea.html](http://www.petcarevabeach.com/guinea.html)

Book:

*ASPCA Kids Guide To Guinea Pigs* - by Mark Evan