



# Some Useful Information For Guinea Pig Owners



## GENERAL HEALTH CARE ADVICE

### DIET

Guinea pigs originate from the mountains in South America where they naturally eat a diet of high fibre vegetation. To cope with this diet, guinea pigs have continuously growing teeth and a complex digestive system.

Most guinea pig health problems are related to an inappropriate diet. The plants in South America have a much higher vitamin C content than the vegetation in the UK. It is essential that your guinea pig receives enough vitamin C in his diet as guinea pigs, like humans, cannot synthesise this vitamin. A deficiency in vitamin C will cause poor immune function, predisposing the guinea pig to infection and parasite infestation. It can also lead to dental problems and in severe cases scurvy develops which if not treated promptly, can be fatal.

### YOUR GUINEA PIG NEEDS:

- A tablespoon (no more) of a good quality guinea pig food – we recommend Oxbow Cavy Performance for young guineas up to a year old, Oxbow Cavy Cuisine or Supa Guinea Excel for adults.
- Ad-lib good quality hay – we recommend Oxbow Alfalfa Hay for growing guinea pigs (up to 6 months of age) and then Oxbow Timothy Hay or other hays in the Oxbow range for adults.
- Ad-lib grass, either grazed from the lawn or hand picked. Never feed your guinea pig mower clippings as this can cause colic.
- A small amount of leafy green vegetables e.g. cabbage, broccoli, parsley, dark green lettuce, rocket etc. Do not feed spinach as this can cause bladder stones. Always introduce new foods slowly, in small quantities, to avoid stomach upsets.
- Occasional treats of small pieces of apple, carrot, tomato 2-3 times a week. Guinea pigs will let you know what they like and dislike, so you will need to experiment at first to find out what they will eat!
- Most treats sold in pet shops are very high in sugar and low in fibre so are generally unsuitable.

The correct diet is essential not just for the general health of your guinea pig, but also for its welfare. It is especially important for its role in dental disease. See further on for more information.



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### NEUTERING:

It is a good idea to arrange for male guinea pigs to be castrated. As well as preventing unwanted mating, this can help with behavioural problems such as aggression and fighting. This can be done from 5 months of age. After neutering, we recommend regular weight checks as your guinea can put on weight.

**We do not routinely spay females.**

### PREVENTION OF DENTAL DISEASE:

Dental disease is an extremely common problem and a very difficult one to treat. It is also very complex and is closely associated with nutrition and diet. It can also cause secondary problems such as anorexia, poor grooming, facial abscesses, eye infections, colic or pneumonia. Your guinea pig might also be more susceptible to *Trixacarus Caviae* mites due to immune suppression and altered behaviour. In the summer, dental disease can be associated with fly strike due to failure to eat caecotrophs (the soft, often dark green pellets passed through the gut which the guinea pig must consume again to extract nutrients). We recommend a vet checks your guinea pig's teeth every 6 months.

There are 3 contributory factors to dental disease. The first is genetic or inherited. The second is due to poor nutrition relating to growth and development of teeth and supporting bones of the skull. The third is due to failure to provide enough roughage to naturally wear down their continually growing teeth. The first cause can only be solved by responsible breeding, however, the second and third can be solved by responsible pet ownership:

It is best to feed a **pelleted feed (e.g. "Supa-guinea")**, rather than a coarse mix of cereals – since guineas are selective feeders they will tend to leave what they don't like in the mix. A pelleted feed ensures they truly are receiving a balanced diet. It is also a good idea to allow them daily access to the outside in order to bask in the sun which provides vitamin D through the skin, enhancing absorption of calcium from the gut for healthy teeth and bones. Being outside also encourages grazing and wearing down of claws. Do not feed rabbit food to guinea pigs as it contains no vitamin C which is essential for healthy guinea pigs.

Fibrous food, such as good quality grass and hay should be fed ad lib to provide dental wear and also improve welfare by decreasing boredom (**ask us about the "Oxbow" range of guinea pig hay**). It is best to think of a guinea pig's diet the same way as for a child – the fibrous food



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is greens and the pellets are “sweets” (although these sweets are good for you!). A small bowlful of pellets is all that is required every day and this should be consumed within 2 hours – **the majority of the diet should be fibrous**. The diet can also be supplemented with the outside leaves of cauliflower, stems of broccoli, broccoli flowers, green or black cabbage, kale, chicory, carrots, parsnips, raw beetroot, celery, cucumber, small amounts of parsley and small pieces of apple. Do not feed too much dandelion as it is a diuretic and can make their droppings soft if fed to excess.

### KEEPING GUINEA PIGS AND RABBITS TOGETHER

We do not recommend that guinea pigs and rabbits are kept together. Rabbits can bully guinea pigs and they can inflict a lot of damage by kicking with their powerful hind legs. Also because they are different species, guinea pigs and rabbits carry different bacteria in their lungs which increases the risk of pneumonia in both species.

### OUT-OF-HOURS

Please call us as usual. An answer-phone will give you the number of our dedicated emergency service – **Vets Now Ltd. (See Emergencies on our website)**. This is manned by vets and nurses who only work nights so they are fresh, awake and awaiting your call, enabling your pet to get the best out of hours hospital care. They are specialists in emergency and critical care and have access to all the facilities required to provide a high class emergency service.

We hope you find this information useful. We would appreciate any comments and remember we're only a phone call away!

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