

# Guinea Pig

*Cavia porcellus*



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Guinea pigs are social companion animals that require daily interaction. They communicate by making various sounds that have different meanings and “popcorn” or jump in the air when happy.



### Is a guinea pig the right companion animal for you?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check “Yes” or “No” after reading the following statements:

- I have an appropriate location and space for a guinea pig.
- I know that male and female guinea pigs should not be housed together.
- I will provide daily, supervised time for this guinea pig outside the habitat.
- I can commit to providing proper care for this guinea pig.
- A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.

If you answered, “Yes” to these statements, a guinea pig may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a guinea pig and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

**Average Size** 8 to 11 inches long

**Life Span** Up to 8 years with proper care

**Diet** High-quality guinea pig food; timothy hay, fresh vegetables, and fruits  
 Requires 30–50 mg of vitamin C daily from vitamin supplements, parsley, washed citrus fruits  
 Treats should not exceed 10% of total food intake  
 Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water changed daily  
 Do not feed chocolate, alcohol or caffeine as these can cause serious medical problems

**Feeding** Food and water should always be available  
 Small amounts of fruits, or vegetables can be given daily  
 Fruits and vegetables not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded

**Housing** Guinea pigs acclimate well to average household temperatures; be cautious of extreme temperature changes; habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area  
 An approximately 30”Lx15”Wx15”H, escape-proof habitat with a solid surface area and plenty of room for exercise and play makes a good home for one guinea pig; it is best to provide the largest habitat possible; provide a place to hide  
 1–2 inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes hardwood shavings or pelleted or recycled paper; cedar-based products may cause harm and are not recommended  
 Exercise wheels and plastic balls may cause injury to guinea pigs and should be used carefully; if guinea pigs chew the toys, remove the toys immediately to prevent internal harm  
 Different types of small animals should not be housed together. House adult males separately.

### Recommended Supplies

- |   |   |                                       |
|---|---|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriately sized cage | <input type="checkbox"/> High-quality guinea pig food | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiding place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bedding                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Vitamin C                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Chew stick   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Timothy hay              | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Nesting box  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about guinea pigs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Food bowl                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Toys         |

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**Normal Behavior and Interaction** Easy to handle; prefers a routine and similar times for playing, feeding and resting each day  
Hides in objects, but will come out when people are near the habitat  
Chews on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously; ensure have plenty of chew sticks available

**Habitat Maintenance** Remove wet spots daily; change bedding weekly or more often, as needed  
Clean the habitat and its contents once a week with mild soap and water, rinse and allow to dry completely before placing guinea pig back into the habitat

**Grooming and Hygiene** Guinea pigs stay clean and do not need baths; clean with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes, if necessary; fur may be brushed with a soft brush  
Consult with a veterinarian if a guinea pig's teeth or nails seem too long  
Because all guinea pigs are potential carriers of infectious diseases, always wash your hands before and after handling your guinea pig and/or the habitat contents to help prevent the potential of spread of diseases.  
Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing and/or caring for a guinea pig and should consider not having a guinea pig as a pet. For more information regarding guinea pigs and disease, contact the Center for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/> and PETCO at <http://www.petco.com/pet care info/companion animal care sheets>.

- Signs of a Healthy Animal**
- Active, alert, and sociable
  - Healthy fur
  - Clear eyes
  - Eats and drinks regularly
  - Communicates by squeaking
  - Walks normally

**Common Health Issues**

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stools caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing, or other illness.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian to possibly have teeth trimmed regularly.
Mites	External parasite that causes guinea pigs to lose patches of hair.	Contact an exotic animal veterinarian for treatment.
Ringworm	Skin infection caused by fungi.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian for treatment.
Scurvy	A disease caused by vitamin C deficiency resulting in poor appetite, sore joints and chest, and bleeding from the gums.	If untreated, can be fatal; consult with an exotic animal veterinarian immediately.

- Red Flags**
- Weight loss
  - Distressed breathing
  - Skin lesions
  - Abnormal hair loss
  - Lethargic
  - Overgrown teeth
  - Diarrhea or dirty bottom
  - Eye or nasal discharge
- If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.**

**Sources** *Guinea Pigs in Your Life* by Critter Press  
*The ASPCA Complete Guide to Pet Care* by David L. Carroll

**Note:** The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.