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This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.

General Information

Native to South America, the guinea pig is a lovable rodent that requires relatively easy care. The most common types of guinea pigs are the English or American shorthair, the Peruvian (long-haired), and the Abyssinian (swirled hair). Guinea pigs are very curious and enjoy time to explore outside of their cage but can be destructive by chewing on household items like baseboards and cords, so they must be supervised. When picking up your guinea pig, scoop them up from the bottom while supporting their belly and feet. Nails should be trimmed regularly (every 2-3 months). You may see your guinea pig eat its own feces – this is normal and contributes to a healthy digestive system.

Lifespan

Most guinea pigs can live up to 5-7 years.

Spaying and Neutering

Neutering males can be done to reduce aggressive behaviors, or to house with another female to avoid accidental breeding. Females can be spayed if medically necessary for reproductive diseases such as cystic ovaries or uterine/ovarian cancers.

Housing

Guinea pigs need a solid bottom cage with a minimum size requirement of four feet long and two feet deep. That space should be doubled if more than two guinea pigs are housed together. Guinea pigs will chew wood and plastic items so ceramic, or metal dishes are ideal for offering food. Water bowls get very dirty, so water bottles attached to the side of the cage are preferred. Carefresh (recycled shredded paper) bedding or layers of fleece bedding are the best options to use at the bottom of their cage, as rough or abrasive surfaces can cause pododermatitis. There should be several hides that your guinea pig can get completely under to hide and sleep. Exercise wheels and balls are not recommended for guinea pigs as their backs are not flexible enough and use of these items can cause serious injury.

Diet

All of the teeth of guinea pigs grow continuously throughout their life. Chewing grass hay (timothy, orchard, oat hay, etc) wears down their teeth to keep them at an appropriate length, and therefore, should be provided at all times. Hay also keeps the



digestive tract functioning well and prevents obesity and diarrhea. Alfalfa hay should only be used in guinea pigs less than a year old or if they're pregnant/nursing due to the high level of calcium. Elevated calcium levels can contribute to bladder stones, which are a common problem for guinea pigs. Pellets specifically formulated for guinea pigs, which are fortified with Vitamin C, should be offered at 1/8 cup per guinea pig per day. Avoid mixes with nuts, corn, seeds, and fruit. Lastly, guinea pigs have a higher Vitamin C requirement than other small mammals. Fresh vegetables

like bell peppers, romaine lettuce, snap peas, cilantro, parsley, and carrots are a great source of dietary Vitamin C, however, should be offered very sparingly as they can cause gastrointestinal upset. Vitamin C drops that can be added to the water bottle degrade within 24 hours, so they are not recommended.

Common Medical Conditions

Pododermatitis

- Caused by abrasive surfaces
- Severe cases may develop deep bacterial infections and significant lameness

Bladder stones

- Caused by diets high in calcium (alfalfa, kale, spinach, ect)
- Symptoms include blood in urine, pain during urination, lethargy, and anorexia

Dental Disease

- Causes include malocclusions (misalignment of teeth causing pain and difficulty eating) and overgrowth (long teeth that may cause abscesses, infections, or ulcers)
- Chewing problems can result in anorexia or weight loss.
- Symptoms include excessive drooling, difficulty eating, weight loss, dropping food, and squinty/watery eyes due to tooth root abscessation.
- Treatment involves trimming and filing down the overgrown teeth using special tools while under sedation
- Some guinea pigs will require dental trimmings every 3-6 months if severe malocclusions are present

GI Stasis

- Refers to sudden disruption of GI motility and has many possible causes
- If your guinea pig does not eat or have regular bowel movements in over 12-24 hours, contact your vet immediately as GI stasis can quickly become a life-threatening emergency

References

Animal Hospital in Centennial, CO. Aurora Animal Hospital. (n.d.). <https://www.auroraanimalhospital.com/>

For Exotic Animal Veterinary Medicine Professionals. LafeberVet. (2025, April 25). <https://lafeber.com/vet/>

Vitamin C

Vitamin C content in 1 cup portions of selected foods

Turnip greens	260 mg
Mustard greens	252 mg
Dandelion greens	200 mg
Kale	192 mg
Brussel sprouts	173 mg
Collard greens	140 mg
Parsley	140 mg
Guavas	125 mg
Broccoli leaf*	120 mg
Beet greens	100 mg
Cauliflower	100 mg
Kohlrabi	100 mg
Strawberries	100 mg
Honeydew melon	90 mg
Broccoli florets*	87 mg
Spinach	60 mg
Raspberries	60 mg
Rutabaga	52 mg
Cabbage	50 mg
Orange	50 mg

*Broccoli stem has 0 mg vitamin C