



Groupe Vétérinaire MONVET Inc.

**GUINEA PIG GUIDE**





# FEEDING YOUR GUINEA PIG

## Food

### Fibers

Since guinea pigs are herbivores, their diets should consist mainly of fiber. Not only is it **important that they eat a lot of it, but also that they eat it often**. Indeed, nibbling all day long ensures a continuous digestive transit.

This is crucial to them because if the transit stops (gastrointestinal stasis), then an important amount of gas will accumulate in their stomach and, since guinea pigs cannot burp or vomit, will cause distension of the gastrointestinal tract followed by a possible rupture.

Consequently, guinea pigs need constant access to hay. Timothy hay is preferred over alfalfa hay, which contains too much calcium.

Another benefit provided by a diet rich in fiber is that it ensures proper wear of guinea pigs' teeth. In fact, their teeth are constantly growing and, if they are not worn adequately, will deviate and form sharp edges that can wound the animals' tongues or cheeks.

Chewing hay promotes a circular movement of the jaw, which wears out all sides of the teeth evenly. Pellets, on the other hand, are the least adapted food for guinea pigs' dentition because chewing is done vertically and wears only parts of the teeth. For that reason, pellets should not take up too much space in this species nutrition.

### Vegetables

A handful of vegetables can be given to guinea pigs once or twice a day. **Those who are leafy and dark green are to be prioritized** such as lettuce (romaine, leaf, etc., except Iceberg which should be avoided), celery with its leaves, green peppers, zucchini, chard, mint, coriander, chicory and dandelion leaves. Spinach, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussel sprouts can also be offered, but only in small quantities because they contain a lot of calcium.



It is important to introduce new vegetables in small amounts, one at a time. They also need to be washed with clean water beforehand. If a new vegetable causes diarrhea, then it should not be given again.

In regards to fruits, it is best to limit the quantity to 1 tablespoon per day as their sugar content is very high.





# FEEDING YOUR GUINEA PIG

## Vitamin C supplementation

Guinea pigs also need a diet rich in vitamin C because they cannot synthesize this vitamin (contrary to the majority of mammals). A lack of vitamin C can cause scurvy, a sickness that mainly affects cartilage, bones, skin, and nails.

Fruits and dark green and vibrant colored vegetables are the best sources of vitamin C. Here are a few examples: kale, parsley, beet leaves, chicory, spinach, red and orange peppers, broccoli, tomatoes, kiwis, and oranges. **At least one of these foods must be given daily in order to fulfill your little companion's vitamin C needs.**

Be careful though once again with spinach and fruits because, as mentioned before, they contain a lot of calcium and sugar respectively. These should only be offered in small quantities (not more than 1 tablespoon per day).

## Pellets

High quality guinea pig pellets can also represent an adequate source of vitamin C. However, because vitamin C, among others, is particularly sensitive to heat and light, it deteriorates quickly in the pellets. Consequently, a bag of pellets should not be kept, either open or closed, for more than 2 months. In fact, pellets should be purchased only in small amounts and the bag tightly sealed and refrigerated in order to conserve its content's freshness as long as possible.

In addition to containing vitamin C, a feed is of high quality when it is rich in fiber (20% and more) and low in protein (16% and less), low in fat (2.5% and less), and low in calcium (1% and less). It can be given, again in small quantities, at a portion of 2 tablespoons per kg (bodyweight). Young, growing guinea pigs can freely eat pellets until 6 months of age. Pellets fed to them should be higher in protein (18%).

In certain cases, additional supplementation of vitamin C, available as a liquid to be added to your guinea pig's drinking water, might be necessary. Feel free to consult with your veterinarian to know if he needs it and how much to give him.



In order to prevent a vitamin C deficiency in your pet, pellets and liquid supplements should not be the only sources of vitamin C in his diet.

## Other foods

Nuts, grains, corn, dried fruits, bread, pasta, chocolate, and other sweets should be avoided, as well as pellets that contain these foods.

## Water

Your guinea pig should have access to clean and fresh water at all times. Some guinea pigs drink from a bottle, so it is important to check that it is always working properly.

Other guinea pigs prefer drinking from a bowl. If this is the case, the bowl should be heavy enough to prevent it from tipping over.

## GUINEA PIG CARE

### Nails

It is important to cut your pet's nails regularly, approximately once a month. Get him used to having his paws and nails handled from a young age and reward him with his favorite fruits or vegetables. This will make cutting the nails easier for you and more enjoyable for him.



### Cleanliness

Guinea pigs do not defecate in a specific area of their cage. On the contrary, they urinate and defecate anywhere in their environment. Thus, it is important that the bottom of their cage be completely covered with a substrate that is absorbent and dust-free, such as soft recycled newspaper litter (specifically made for small mammals), which is ideal. Unscented aspen wood chips are also a good choice for a litter.

Stools, urine and soiled litter need to be removed many times each day and the litter must be completely changed once a week.



#### **My guinea pig's urine is thick and whitish. Is this normal?**

No! A guinea pig's urine is normally yellow and clear. However, urine can sometimes become more opaque if there is a lot of calcium in it, which is usually due to a diet too rich in calcium, as this species excretes calcium through their urine. If this is the case, then the diet should be modified because an excess of calcium can lead to the formation of urinary stones, among other problems.

#### **What about if the urine is red or orange?**

That can be normal and caused by the presence of a red pigment in the urine called porphyrin. On the other hand, urine that is red, pink or orange can also be a sign of a problem within the urinary system. Thus, a veterinarian should be consulted when a change in the appearance of the animal's urine is noticed.

# GUINEA PIG CARE

## The cage

Guinea pigs do not climb or jump. For this reason, the use of a horizontal cage that is spacious or of a roofless enclosure with vertical walls that is approximately 25 cm in height is appropriate. However, if other animals have access to your guinea pig's cage, it should stay closed for safety concerns.



It is also important to provide him with hiding spots in the cage so he can have a quiet space to relax.



## Fur maintenance

Your guinea pig should be brushed regularly to limit hair ingestion. Certain breeds have very long fur and a “hair trim” might be sometimes needed. Again, get him used to this kind of handling at a young age by rewarding him with his favorite vegetables or fruits like you do with the nail trimming.

### Social interactions

Since guinea pigs are anxious by nature and stress very easily, it takes a lot of kindness and patience to tame them.

They can live alone but because they are very sociable and they appreciate the company of their peers, they can also be kept in groups.



#### BE CAREFUL!!



Guinea pigs can reproduce at a young age, even with their brothers and sisters, so it is important to be vigilant when many of them live together. In fact, males are fertile as young as 3 months of age and females, as young as 2 months of age. Thus, it is recommended that the animals' sex be determined early on by a veterinarian and that males be kept away from females at all times to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Guinea pigs are considered prey animals. Therefore, contact with ferrets is to be avoided at all times! Interactions with cats and dogs are possible however, but still should be supervised closely.

Even though guinea pigs and rabbits can have friendly interactions, it is not recommended to put them in contact with one another. Indeed, rabbits can be asymptomatic carriers (being infected without developing symptoms) of a bacteria known as *Bordetella bronchiseptica*, among others, and can transmit it to guinea pigs, who are particularly sensitive to it. They can develop pneumonia because of this bacterial infection.

Sterilization is not performed routinely in Guinea pigs because this species does not tolerate general anesthesia very well and frequently develops postsurgical complications.

In certain specific circumstances however, the procedure can still be done. This is the case with shelters who have guinea pigs fixed from the outset, specially males.

# PARTICULAR FEATURES AND FREQUENT HEALTH PROBLEMS IN GUINEA PIGS

## When should you consult your veterinarian?

Guinea pigs have an average lifespan of 4 to 7 years. An annual veterinary exam for your pet is recommended in order to ensure that he is in good health.



It is important not to wait if a problem develops and consult a veterinarian **quickly!!**

The following behaviors can be associated with signs of pain or sickness that need an **urgent** medical intervention:

- Diminished appetite, refusal to eat\*;
- Absence or decrease in the production of feces or urine, stools that are smaller and dryer than usual;
- The pet stays hidden or immobile for several hours;
- He has difficulty moving, seems paralyzed, or presents with a limb distortion;
- He constantly extends its neck to breathe.

*\* If your companion refuses to eat for no more than half a day, you must consult a veterinarian as soon as possible.*

As mentioned before, guinea pigs need to eat hay continually in order to avoid a digestive stasis and the disastrous consequences associated with it. Among the other factors that can also cause a stasis, there is stress, obesity, lack of exercise, inadequate nutrition, dental problems, ingestion of objects or other non-digestible materials, pain, or even sickness.





# HEALTH RECORD



## MEDICAL HISTORY

DATE (MM-DD-YYYY)	DIAGNOSTIC

## Deworming

Deworming is recommended in the fall for guinea pigs who go outdoors during the summer.

## DEWORMING

DATE (MM-DD-AAAA)	FECAL ANALYSIS	TREATMENT

## HEALTH RECORD



### TESTS/RESULTS

DATE (MM-DD-YYYY)	TESTS	RESULTS

### WEIGHT CHART

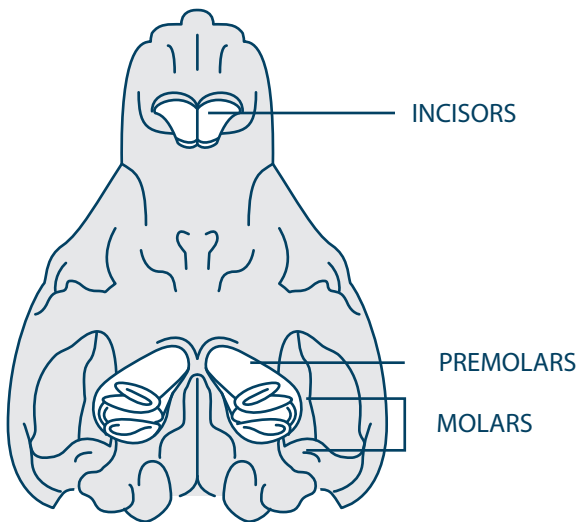
DATE (MM-DD-YYYY)	WEIGHT	FOOD	QUANTITY/DAY	COMMENTS
		HAY:		
		VEGETABLES:		
		FRUITS:		
		PELLETS:		
		OTHER:		



## HEALTH RECORD

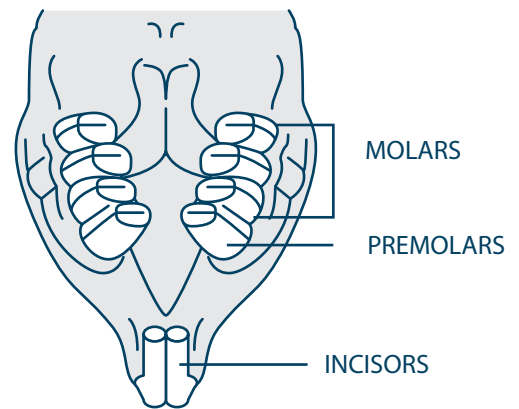
### DENTAL CHART

**RIGHT**



**MAXILLARY  
(upper jaw)**

**LEFT**



**MANDIBULAR  
(lower jaw)**

DATE OF TEETH  
TRIMMING (MM-DD-YYYY)

IMAGING: RADIOGRAPHY OR  
CT-SCAN (YES/NO)

TRIMMED TEETH

COMMENTS

# MONVET

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