



Caring for your Guinea Pig



Guinea pigs need access to hay ALL of the time. 75% of their diet should be good quality hay. Your pigs are grazing animals like horses, designed to digest leaves & stems. Grass hay, such as Timothy, Botanical, Oaten or Orchard, keeps their digestive tract moving. Grinding fibrous hay all day keeps their constantly growing teeth worn down to avoid expensive dental problems and prevents boredom. Lucerne is NOT a grass hay Bt with its high calcium & energy, should be avoided for adult guinea pigs.

An ideal diet includes unlimited grass hay a measured daily amount of Oxbow's fortified pellets and unlimited herbs and greens

We like: Cos, Bok Choy, Butter Lettuce, Asian Greens, Red Leaf Lettuce, Coriander, Parsley, Mint, Carrot Tops, Dandelion Greens, Basil, Capsicum

Guinea pigs are not designed to eat grains, nuts, seeds and corn.

A specialist exotic animal vet will tell you that grains, nuts and seeds might be healthy for a human, but guinea pigs are not designed to digest starch and these ingredients are full of starch. They cause obesity in these animals which is one of the most common problems.

Guinea pig mixes are not recommended.

Mixes (a bag of guinea pig food that has sunflower seeds, fruit bits, lucerne chaff etc) let the animal selective feed - that is eat the stuff they like and leave anything that might be healthy in the bowl. It is much like a child picking the marshmallow bits out of their breakfast cereal. Oxbow's fortified pellets are a much higher fibre option that do not let the animal selective feed.

Guinea pigs need Vitamin C daily or they get an illness called scurvy.

Does the pelleted portion of your pig's diet include a high quality, stabilised vitamin C and does it have an expiry date?

Vitamins disappear over time and if your product doesn't state the specific vitamin levels with an expiry date, you don't know what is really still in there. Oxbow pellets have a vitamin C component that has been tested to ensure appropriate coverage until the marked expiry on the bag. If you are not feeding Oxbow's pellets, try chewable Oxbow Natural Science Vitamin C tablets to ensure this critical element in the diet.

As a social animal, your guinea pig will be much happier, active and talkative if he has a same sex or desexed friend. Please don't keep one guinea pig alone. Guinea pigs can be desexed. Many males can be successfully housed together.

Consider carefully before breeding. The RSPCA and private rescue groups are already dealing with large numbers of guinea pigs that need new homes. Two can very quickly become 6 and soon you have 30. Thirty guinea pigs are a lot of work. Just two guinea pigs who can't breed are a wonderful addition to the family.

Guinea pigs can die from heat stress when left outside in the summer.

Ensure they have somewhere to get away from the heat. Put a frozen water bottle in their enclosure to lie against on really hot days. You may also take your guinea pigs inside » these days a lot of

guinea pigs are housed indoors where they are protected from dogs, snakes, summer heat, etc. Indoor guinea pigs quickly become much more valued and interactive members of the family. But don't forget they benefit from a bit of time in gentle, unfiltered sunlight

FEEDING THE ADULT GUINEA PIG

Get to know your guinea pigs digestive system, nutritional concerns and how to properly feed your adult guinea pig.

Guinea pigs are well developed at birth and within a few months are able to eat an adult diet. They are strict herbivores, that eat only plants, and like rabbits, are hind-gut fermenters that practice coprophagy (ingestion of one's own faeces).

Digestive System ,

Coprophagy may be a source of B vitamins and a means of optimizing protein utilization. However, its precise contribution to the nutritional needs of guinea pigs is not fully known. As hind gut fermenters, guinea pigs digest much of their food in the caecum and colon (large intestine), which are at the end of the digestive tract. The caecum, a large, thin-walled sac located at the junction of the small and large intestine, contains up to 65% of gastrointestinal (GI) contents. Within the caecum, bacteria and protozoa aid digestion of foods taken in by the guinea pig.

Fibre

Fibre is needed for these bacteria and protozoa within the caecum to stay in balance and function properly. Fibre also aids in maintaining normal GI motility or movement. Without Fibre, the gastrointestinal tract slows down, resulting in subsequent changes in the caecum pH, fermentation and bacterial population. With time these changes in the intestinal tract environment can lead to indigestion.

You can provide this essential fibre by feeding your guinea pig free-choice grass hay. Oxbow recommends feeding unlimited quantities of timothy orchard or oat hay.

Hay also helps prevent boredom by satisfying your guinea pig's innate desire to chew, which is an important means of dental health maintenance.

In addition to hay, Oxbow's timothy hay-based, Essentials - Adult Guinea Pig Food is a high-Fibre pelleted diet which contains stabilized vitamin C and is designed to meet the specific nutritional needs of your guinea pig.

Health Concerns

Guinea pigs are becoming a more valued, loved and cared for pet in the eyes of their owners, and as a result, veterinary care for guinea pigs has increased. Veterinarians seeing guinea pigs are noticing several health problems attributed to nutrition: vitamin C deficiency, gastrointestinal ileus, obesity, enteritis and urolithiasis.

Vitamin C Deficiency

Signs of vitamin C deficiency (scurvy) include:

- Hind leg weakness
- Gum inflammation
- Unkempt fur coat
- Bleeding in the joints or under the skin.

Like humans, guinea pigs are unable to produce their own vitamin C and require a dietary source. Daily requirements of vitamin C range from 20-50 mg per kg of body weight. In order to prevent vitamin C deficiency and subsequent scurvy, Oxbow recommends feeding Adult Guinea Pig Food, a pelleted diet containing stabilized vitamin C.

Gastrointestinal Ileus

Gastrointestinal ileus (malfunction of the digestive tract due to gut slowdown) is commonly seen in guinea pigs on low-fibre diets. Many times pet owners do not notice the signs associated with gastrointestinal slowdown until it is too late. Decreased appetite, a bloated or tense abdomen, along with lethargy and a decrease in the volume and size of faeces passed are all signs of gastrointestinal ileus. Diets that incorporate high levels of non-digestible fibre in the form of free-choice grass hay promote increased gut motility and thereby prevent this gut slowdown. Oxbow's Adult Guinea Pig Food is made from high—quality timothy hay that provides the appropriate fibre needed for healthy digestive system function.

Obesity

Obesity in guinea pigs can lead to respiratory heart and liver disease, Typical guinea pig feeds on the market contain high levels of fat, commonly over 3% and as high as 5%. These feeds contain corn, oats, and other grains that are designed to appeal to the consumer; but raise the starch and energy content of the food. When these high—fat foods are fed free—choice, obesity can occur: Obesity not only leads to the previously mentioned health problems, but can also prevent coprophagy, which is necessary for the maintenance of normal gastrointestinal health. Adult Guinea Pig Food was designed to prevent obesity by adding sufficient fibre, while at the same time eliminating grains that raise fat content. This combination of high fibre and low fat aids in overall digestion. The minimum fibre level of Adult Guinea Pig Food is 25% and the maximum is 28%, thus providing a healthy balance of fibre and energy.

Enteritis

Enteritis (intestinal inflammation associated with toxin production) is a problem commonly associated with diets that contain high levels of energy (starch and glucose). A low—fibre, high—starch diet promotes gut hypomotility (Slow gut movement) and changes the intestinal pH and microbial population which allows pathogens (bad bacteria) to produce toxins that can be fatal. The guinea pig with enteritis may have soft stools and be hunched and inactive due to increased GI gas production and the resulting abdominal pain. High—Fibre, low-starch Adult Guinea Pig Food is formulated to prevent enteritis.

Urolithiasis

Urolithiasis (bladder stones) is being seen in more and more guinea pigs. Although many are secondary to urinary tract infections, a certain percentage of stones are caused by an imbalance of calcium and phosphorus in the diet.

Grass hay is a forage feed, the natural diet for a wild guinea pig, has a higher calcium to phosphorus ratio. Grains have the inverse relationship and contain more phosphorus than calcium. Research has proven that diets containing an inverse ratio of calcium and phosphorus can cause stones and soft tissue calcifications. Dietary levels of vitamin D and magnesium may also influence the development of bladder stones.

The pellets provide the mature guinea pig with the proper calcium to phosphorus ratio and appropriate levels of vitamin D and magnesium.