

GUINEA PIG CARE GUIDE

Cavia porcellus

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Three things do most of the heavy lifting in guinea pig care: daily vitamin C, comfortable temperatures, and regular vet visits. Get those right and you've handled the majority of what kills guinea pigs prematurely.

🌟 THE BIG THREE FOR A HEALTHY GUINEA PIG

Priority	Why It Matters
1. Vitamin C — daily	Guinea pigs cannot produce their own vitamin C. Without a daily source, they develop scurvy. This is entirely preventable.
2. Temperature control	They do not tolerate heat well. Above 75°F starts becoming risky; above 85°F is a medical emergency.
3. Annual vet exams	Guinea pigs are subtle communicators. By the time illness is obvious, it has often been progressing for a while.

🍷 VITAMIN C

- Guinea pigs, like humans, **cannot synthesize their own vitamin C** — a daily dietary source is non-negotiable
- Aim for at least **25 mg** of vitamin C per guinea pig per day
- Vitamin C breaks down over time, especially in older or improperly stored pellets — freshness matters
- Do not add liquid vitamin C to drinking water** — some guinea pigs will avoid the taste, and vitamin C promotes bacterial growth in bottles

Good Vitamin C Sources	Notes
Sweet bell peppers	One of the highest vitamin C vegetables available
Parsley and cilantro	Easy to offer daily, well accepted
Kale and endive	Also provide good leafy green nutrition
Oxbow Vitamin C tablets (if recommended)	Supplement only — discuss with your vet first

- A consistent vitamin C routine supports joints, teeth, immunity, and overall health — skip it and the consequences are real

🍽️ DIET (IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE)

Food Type	Amount & Frequency	Notes
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Grass hay	Unlimited, always available	Timothy, orchard, or oat hay for adults; alfalfa for juveniles under 3 months
Guinea pig pellets	1 tablespoon per pig per day	Must contain stabilized vitamin C; avoid seed mixes or colorful pieces
Fresh vegetables	Small handful daily	Focus on leafy greens and vitamin C-rich options; introduce new foods gradually
Fresh water	Always available	Bottle, heavy bowl, or both — check daily for clogs, leaks, or debris

- Hay is the foundation of the diet — it supports normal digestion and keeps teeth worn properly. There is no substitute.
- Avoid seed mixes and foods with colorful pieces — guinea pigs will selectively eat the fun bits and leave the nutritious bits



HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

- Minimum enclosure size: **2 ft × 3 ft per guinea pig** — larger is always better, and they will use the space
- Solid flooring only — **never wire flooring**, which causes foot injuries (pododermatitis) and chronic discomfort
- Place the enclosure in a quiet area of the home, away from drafts, direct sunlight, and heaters

Parameter	Target
Ideal temperature range	55–75°F (13–24°C)
Maximum safe temperature	Below 80°F — above 85°F is dangerous
Outdoor time	Supervised only; shade must always be available

Bedding options:

- Shredded paper (non-inked), recycled paper products or pellets, hardwood shavings, or fleece
- **Never use pine, cedar, or corn cob** bedding — respiratory irritation risk

Cleaning schedule:

- Spot clean daily — remove soiled bedding and uneaten fresh food
- Replace bedding every few days — ammonia buildup from urine irritates the respiratory tract and is a direct contributor to respiratory disease



ENRICHMENT & SOCIAL NEEDS

- Guinea pigs are **social animals** and should be housed with at least one compatible companion — a single guinea pig requires significantly more daily human interaction
- Provide at least one more hide than the number of guinea pigs in the enclosure — everyone needs an exit option
- Offer safe chew items: untreated branches, guinea pig-specific toys, and hay-based chews
- Guinea pigs explore with their mouths — supervision during out-of-cage time is important, not optional

- They are curious and active during dawn and dusk — schedule playtime accordingly

COMMON HEALTH CONDITIONS

Category	Conditions	Watch For
Dental	Malocclusion, tooth fractures	Reduced appetite, drooling, weight loss, dropping food
Skin	Mites, lice, hair loss, fungal infections	Scratching, hair thinning, crusty skin, restlessness
Respiratory	Pneumonia, upper respiratory infections	Sneezing, nasal discharge, labored breathing, lethargy
Urinary	Cystitis, bladder stones	Straining to urinate, blood in urine, hunched posture
Reproductive	Ovarian cysts, pregnancy toxemia	Hair loss, lethargy, abdominal swelling in females
Nutritional	Vitamin C deficiency (scurvy)	Joint swelling, reluctance to move, rough coat, weight loss
Environmental	Heat stress	Lethargy, panting, drooling, unresponsiveness — emergency

Contact us promptly if your guinea pig shows decreased appetite, weight loss, low energy, nasal or eye discharge, changes in stool, or any sudden behavioral change. Guinea pigs are subtle communicators — visible illness usually means it's been going on longer than you think.

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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