



Ten Things to Know Before Adopting a Guinea Pig (cavy)

1 Guinea Pigs & Children: With proper care, guinea pigs live 5 to 7 years (or more). If the guinea pig is for a child, make sure an adult is involved to supervise and make decisions for good, nurturing care.

2 Cage: When it comes to cages, the bigger the better; for one guinea pig 24" by 24" is good. The pan of the cage should be 4 to 6 inches deep. A deep pan will prevent bedding from being kicked out of the pan. Never house a guinea pig on a wire mesh floor. This can be dangerous to their feet and legs. The floor must be made of solid material. Do not use an aquarium. Provide a nest box for the guinea pig to sleep in as this gives the guinea pig a sense of security.

3 Bedding: Carefresh or Aspen bedding is recommended. Never use cedar bedding as it can cause damage to the skin, liver, respiratory system, kidneys, and other health problems. Bedding should be generous and cover the cage pan.

4 Food & Water: Buy pellets formulated for guinea pigs. Do not feed rabbit pellets as rabbits have different dietary needs. Avoid mixes that contain peanuts, sunflower seeds, or other nuts and seeds in the shells. Guinea pigs can choke and die on the shells in these mixes. Put food in a heavy ceramic crock that cannot be chewed, knocked over, or sat in. Make sure your guinea pig has access to clean, dry hay. Timothy hay is the best choice. Place hay in a little hay rack to keep it clean.



Use a water bottle instead of a bowl. Water in a bowl can become contaminated and often gets knocked over. A water bottle will keep water clean and prevent it from getting into bedding materials. Offer fresh greens daily. Good choices are romaine lettuce, dandelion greens (available at Whole Foods), kale, parsley, and spinach. Skip iceberg lettuce as it is not very nutritious. Also good for guinea pigs are carrots with the tops, apples (no apple seeds), grapes, and melons with the seeds removed. Make sure all fruits and vegetables are fresh as mold can be fatal to guinea pigs. There are many things guinea pigs like to eat and some things that are bad for them. Investigate nutritional needs through books and web sites. Never feed chocolate.

5 Vitamin C: Guinea pigs cannot get enough vitamin C from fresh foods alone. Therefore, they require daily vitamin C supplements such as Oasis Vita Drops. Many common health problems affecting guinea pigs are due to vitamin C deficiency. Guinea pig pellets may be fortified with vitamin C. However, this may not be enough as vitamin C in food deteriorates with time and the food may not provide enough of the vitamin. An easy way to supplement vitamin C is by putting it in the water, which must be changed daily. Another easy method is to feed fresh foods high in vitamin C. Consult your veterinarian, or the web site listed below, for other forms of vitamin C supplementation.

6 Cleanliness: Keep cages, food dishes, and water bottles very clean. Guinea pigs produce a lot of droppings and urine. The cage must be spot cleaned every day and completely cleaned often. Keeping a clean cage will help avoid many health problems.

7 Female Guinea Pigs: Please consider not breeding female guinea pigs as there are very many unwanted guinea pigs needing homes. (Note that guinea pigs bred after 7 months old are at risk for life-threatening complications.)

8 Handling: Guinea pigs require a lot of attention and love. But they must be handled gently. Approach a pig with two hands, placing one hand over the abdomen and chest and one hand under the hindquarters. Children must be supervised. Guinea pigs have died due to being accidentally crushed or dropped. Guinea pigs have small bladders and may eliminate on you while you hold them. Spare them excessive noise and needless excitement. Interactions with other pets should always be supervised by an adult. Consult books and web sites about whether to adopt multiple guinea pigs. A guinea pig alone will get lonely if he does not get enough attention from his human companions. Guinea pigs make cute sounds, especially when hungry. When happy, young guinea pigs will jump straight up in the air (this is called *popcorning*).

9 Common Health Concerns: Dental problems, scurvy, obesity, heat stroke, lice, mites, and respiratory problems are some health problems you may encounter. Make sure to check your guinea pig's teeth and toenails periodically. A vet can trim the teeth and show you how to trim the toenails.

10 Illness: Be sure to find a vet who is experienced with guinea pigs. Do this before there is an emergency. Illness can progress rapidly in small animals. Timely treatment may save your guinea pig's life.

Helpful Resources:

A New Owner's Guide to Guinea Pigs by Karen Bawoll

Barron's A Complete Pet Owners Manual: Guinea Pigs by Katrin Behrend

www.JPGPR.com "Jack Pine Guinea Pig Rescue" — great information about guinea pigs and custom made cages

www.oxbowhay.com "Oxbow Hay Company" — provider of fresh Western Timothy Hay, Cavy Performance-food for young guinea pigs, and Cavy Cuisine-food for adult guinea pigs

