

## CARE OF CHINCHILLAS

**HOUSING:** Cage designed specifically for chinchillas, with multiple levels for jumping. Wire cage bottoms are not recommended as they can cause sores on the bottoms of feet. The larger the cage, the better. Chinchillas are quite cold-tolerant, but are extremely susceptible to heat stroke-they should never be exposed to temperatures exceeding 80 degrees.

**SUBSTRATE:** Cedar and pine shavings have been found to cause liver damage and irritation to the respiratory tract of chinchillas. Aspen shavings, grass hays, recycled paper products, or shredded paper bedding is best. Bedding must be changed frequently as the ammonia from the urine is irritating to the chinchilla's respiratory tract. If it smells strong from the top of the cage, it needs to be replaced.

**FEEDING:** Chinchillas are obligate (strict) herbivores. This means the gut of a chinchilla requires food to be present at all times for it to work. When a chinchilla does not eat, it will become seriously ill very quickly, and the gut may actually shut down, leading to the death of the chinchilla. Most chinchillas that present to us for not eating are already in shut-down mode and unfortunately the mortality rate is quite high. Fiber is the most important aspect of the diet. Feed a formulated chinchilla pellet-not mixes containing seeds. Limit the pellets to 1-2 tablespoons per animal per day. Timothy or other grass hay (whole hay, not cubes or blocks) should be available at all times. Alfalfa hay is not recommended-we have seen seizures caused by this. Small amounts of fresh greens, veggies and occasional fruit may be offered. Do not abruptly change a chinchilla's diet-even switching pellet brands that look identical can cause serious digestive upsets.

**VETERINARY CARE:** We recommend a wellness exam at the time of purchase/adoption, then exams every six months. The back teeth of chinchillas need to be checked regularly for overgrowth. Bloodwork should be done sometime in the first two to three years of age to obtain a normal database, then annually from the age of six to screen for the development of age-related diseases. Females should be spayed early to prevent aggression, males have less tendency toward aggressiveness, but neutering can be done. Always contact your chinchilla's veterinarian with questions and concerns-this is a better source for information than pet stores or the internet.