

CARE OF GUINEA PIGS

HOUSING: Cage or pen designed specifically for guinea pigs. Wire cage bottoms are not recommended as they can cause sores on the bottoms of feet. Some guinea pigs enjoy having multiple levels in the cage, others may not use them.

SUBSTRATE: Cedar and pine shavings have been found to cause liver damage and irritation to the respiratory tract of guinea pigs. 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 guinea pig's respiratory tract. If it smells strong from the top of the cage, it needs to be replaced.

FEEDING: Guinea pigs are obligate (strict) herbivores. This means the gut of a guinea pig requires food to be present at all times for it to work. When a guinea pig does not eat, it will become seriously ill very quickly, and the gut may actually shut down, leading to the death of the guinea pig. Most guinea pigs that present to us for not eating are already in shut-down mode and unfortunately the mortality rate is quite high. Fiber and vitamin C are the most important aspects of the diet. Feed a formulated guinea pig pellet (no seeds)-these should be purchased in small quantities, as the vitamin C added to them deteriorates fairly quickly. Do not rely on the pellets alone to supply a guinea pig's requirement for vitamin C. Kale, cabbage, orange wedges and bell peppers are good sources of vitamin C and should be given daily. Chewable supplement tablets are available as well. Timothy or other grass hay (whole hay, not cubes or blocks) should be available at all times. Limit the pellets to 2-3 tablespoons per pig per day. Do not abruptly change a guinea pig'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 guinea pigs 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 four to screen for the development of age-related diseases. Males should be neutered to prevent aggression, females should be spayed to prevent the development of cystic ovaries. Always contact your guinea pig's veterinarian with questions and concerns-this is a better source for information than pet stores or the internet.