

Aireworth Vets 
SMALL ANIMAL 

Care For Your Guinea Pig



If you have any further queries regarding the welfare of your pet, please do not hesitate to ask a member of staff

We are happy to assist!

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Guinea pigs as pets

Guinea pigs (also known as cavies) are medium-sized rodents that originally came from south America. As long as they are properly cared for, Guinea pigs make very rewarding pets for people of any age. Although they can be shy, with the right handling they can become affectionate and tame.

A friend for your guinea pig

In the wild, guinea pigs live in large groups, so it seems natural that they get lonely on their own.

Two female guinea pigs should get on fine, but two males may fight. A male and female should get on but will breed. A rabbit and a guinea pig may also be good friends, but care should be taken as the rabbit may bully the guinea pig and places should be provided for the guinea pig to hide. All pairings mentioned may all work out if the two animals are introduced early and with care.

Housing your pet

Many people keep guinea pigs in hutches outside. There is nothing wrong with this as a rule, but care needs to be taken to ensure that enough bedding is provided to keep them warm in bad weather.

If you would like to take this approach, you should also watch out for their water freezing in the winter, take care that the hutch is out of the wind, ensure the hutch is raised off the ground to prevent damp and make sure that your pet does not start to chew through it. Hutches make good homes for guinea pigs, but they tend to be difficult to clean.

Guinea pigs also make good pets to live indoors as they do not have a strong smell. As they cannot be litter trained, it is probably a good idea to keep them in a specially made indoor guinea pig house.

These are usually made of metal with a detachable plastic base. They are easy to clean, but tend to be quite big so a space would need to be found in your house. They should not be placed in a draft or too close to a radiator.

For easy cleaning, your guinea pigs house should have a layer of newspaper on the floor, this can be easily lifted out and changed. Sawdust should be placed over the top of this. This is because newspaper alone is not very absorbent and sawdust will drain up most of your guinea pigs urine and keep your pet dry and clean. There are many different bedding materials available for guinea pigs, but by far the best is either hay or straw. These are warm and natural and will not harm your guinea pig when eaten. There must always be a large amount of this available for your guinea pig to make its own bed.

An outdoor run is advisable for your pet as UV light from the sun and grazing on fresh grass are very good for your pet.

Guinea facts

- The average lifespan of a guinea pig is 4-8 years.
- When fully grown, your pet should weigh between 750g and 1000g.
- Guinea pigs reach sexual maturity at 4-6 weeks for females and 9-10 weeks for males.
- The average litter size is 1-6 and babies are weaned fully at about 3 weeks.
- Babies are born fully furred and with open eyes and can eat solids within 24 hours.

Your guinea pig and your vet

Even with the best care and attention, most animals get poorly at least once in their lifetime. If you notice anything unusual about your pet, please contact the surgery. It may not be anything much, but it could be the start of something more serious. It's better to get it checked. Guinea pigs do not need any routine vaccinations like cats, dogs and rabbits do.

If you want to keep a male and female together, it is possible to get the male castrated, this will prevent unwanted babies. There is always a small risk with the anaesthetic, but it will ensure that you don't end up with lots of little guinea pigs to find homes for.

Feeding your pet

Along with humans, Guinea pigs are the only animals that cannot make their own vitamin C. This means that this will be an essential part of their diet. Grass is the best source of this. Complete guinea pig foods (such as Burgess 'Supa Guinea Pig'), that are sold in most pet shops now contain vitamin C, so this can be fed to supplement your pet. Apples and similar fruits are both good sources of the vitamin. Citrus fruits, although rich in the vitamin, should not be fed as they are not good for your guinea pig.

The best diet for your pet should be made up mostly of hay and grass, fresh fruit and guinea pig food can be fed to supplement its diet, and various guinea pig treats can be fed, but only occasionally. Fresh water should always be available, preferably from a water bottle attached to the cage.

