

The McPet Shop

GUINEA PIG

General Information

Guinea pigs are excellent children's pets. They are easy to handle and rarely scratch or bite. However, it is important that they are not over handled in the first week, as they will find it stressful. Guinea pigs respond well to human company and intrigue many with the different sounds they make.

Housing

A hutch is very important for your pet guinea pig so they can get privacy when they need it. The size of hutch you need will depend on the number of guinea pigs you keep together. A hutch 105cm (3ft, 6ins) by 60cm (2ft) is adequate, but the bigger the better. It should be divided into a sleeping and a living area. In the warmer months, guinea pigs can be kept outside but make sure that the hutch is not exposed to wind, rain or sun. If you keep your pet outside, make sure the roof is waterproof and overhangs the front of the hutch. Hay makes good bedding, but it is important to use good quality hay or mites may become a problem. The living area should be covered with wood shavings on top of a layer of paper. The living area should be cleaned out daily and the sleeping area once a week. Guinea pigs are sociable animals and prefer to be kept in pairs or groups.

Exercise

The hutch is only your pet's living space. Guinea pigs love exercise, so an escape proof run is essential and supervised open exercise is of great benefit. Don't forget to lock them securely into their hutch at night for their own safety.

Handling

Leave your guinea pig alone for 24 hours, and limit contact in the first week have little contact to allow settling in. After this time, guinea pigs will enjoy being handled and soon become part of the family. Keep this up, making sure you handle your pet every day. Once your guinea pig has adapted to its new home, start introducing your hand to them, gently stroking it and talking quietly all the time. Take your time, and make sure your pet is not frightened. Once your pet is confident, they can be picked up. Gently place one hand across the shoulders and support their bottom with the other. It is important that handling is supervised by an adult as over keen young children can upset guinea pigs. When frightened a guinea pig will scratch. If they are dropped, it may result in damage to the back and spine. Guinea pigs enjoy daily grooming and this is essential for longhaired breeds.

Feeding

Guinea pigs are fussy eaters and will starve rather than change diet. It is important that you feed the same diet that has been fed in The McPet Shop. Dietary changes must be slow, over several weeks. A proper diet is critical as, like humans, guinea pigs are unable to make their own vitamin C and have to get it from their food. It is important that you use a specially prepared guinea pig food and supplement with a vitamin C additive (Vitasol) in the water at least twice a week. If you don't do this the guinea pig may get scurvy, the symptoms of which are swollen joints and poor skin. Fibre levels must be high to help move food through the bowel properly, therefore, hay must be available at all times. After a few weeks, you can slowly introduce supplements to the diet such as fresh fruit and vegetables. Place a freshly sawn log in the run and lots of guinea pig chews. This gives the guinea pig something to chew on and keeps the teeth in good shape. Water must be available at all times and nipple drinkers are best. Disinfect feeding equipment and water bottles twice a week.

Guinea Pig Health

Guinea pigs are naturally healthy and provided your guinea pig is cared for, it should live a long and healthy life. It is important to check teeth and nails every week as teeth grow throughout life. If your pet is off its food or drooling saliva, have its teeth checked by a vet. Diarrhoea is a serious condition, which is best avoided by keeping the diet the same and introducing new food slowly over 7 to 10 days.

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Guinea pigs are best kept in pairs or groups, but have males neutered to prevent a population explosion. Skin mites can be a problem, but are easily treated provided you notice it early.

If your guinea pig loses their appetite, some body weight, has runny eyes or nose, develops diarrhoea or has a poor coat or skin; seek veterinary advice.

Always ensure you are supplementing with vitamin C.

Your Health and Hygiene

Guinea pigs are clean animals, however, it is important to wash your hands before (so you do not frighten your pet with unusual smells) and after handling your guinea pig (to prevent the spread of infection). Clean your guinea pig's living area daily and sleeping area once a week. Disinfect with a guinea pig friendly product.

Key Guinea Pig Facts

Weaning	3-4 weeks	Breeding	5/7 weeks female and 9/10 weeks male
Gestation	59-72 days	Litter Size	Average of 3 to 4
Adult Weight	0.75-1kg	Life expectancy	4 to 8 years

This Care leaflet is a basic guide only. More information is available from pet care books or the The McPet Shop guide available in the store.

Guarantee

The McPet Shop does not guarantee the age or sex of any animal, bird or fish sold. All livestock is guaranteed for 48 hours from the time of sale. The McPet Shop aims to supply completely healthy pets. If a problem occurs within this period, then please contact the store

CHECK - Tick the box as you complete your task

Housing

- A large **hutch**, consider the number of guinea pigs to be kept.
- A **pen** for the garden.
- **Bedding** material for the living floor (shavings or straw).
- **Bedding** for the sleeping box (hay).
- **Disinfectant** to keep the hutch hygienic.
- A soft **grooming** brush.

Exercise

- A large **run** for the garden.
- Hollow wooden logs to hide and play in.
- **Hollow ferret ball** to hide and play in.

Feeding

- **Food** – A guinea pig food. Continuity is important ask our associates what we have been feeding.
- Food **bowl/hopper** and water **bottle**.
- **Hay Rack**.
- **Disinfectant** for feeding dishes.
- **Chews**.
- A vitamin C **supplement** – Vitasol is used in store.

Knowledge

- **Books** to improve your pet knowledge.