

Common Chinchilla Ailments

The best advice is to consult your vet if you think your chinchillas may be ill.

A sick chinchilla may show unusual behaviour such as becoming restless or lethargic, or crouching in the corner of the cage. The coat may also become dull or there may be a discharge from the ears, eyes or nose.

Eye problems: Any inflammation or soreness of the eyelids or discharge from the eyes can indicate an infection, and a vet should be consulted urgently.

Ear problems: Discharge from the ears or problems with balance are symptoms of ear infection and a vet must be consulted.

Runny nose: This may mean that your chinchilla has a cold, or it could be a symptom of pneumonia and should be taken to a vet immediately.

Overgrown teeth: Chinchillas need something to gnaw on to keep their teeth from growing too long. A vet can trim them if they overgrow.

Fungus: Symptoms of this are loss of fur, poor condition of the coat, crusts, scales or scabs on the face. The chinchilla will need to be taken to the vet.

Constipation/Diarrhoea: These can be caused by change of diet, overeating, stress, lack of water or bad hay. If you are concerned, take the chinchilla to a vet.



Chinchilla Facts

Chinchillas are nocturnal animals and will sleep most of the day, becoming active in the evening. Chinchilla means 'little chinta', the name of the South American Indian tribe after which they are named. They come in a variety of colours, the most common being grey but also including African violet and ebony (which are the rarest colours), beige, black/grey, charcoal and brown. All chinchillas except the ebony have white underbellies.

Life span:
Can live for
up to 20
years

Maturity:
7 to 8 months

Weight:
400g to 600g

**Weaning
age:**
Six to eight
weeks

Size:
Body 22.5 to
38 cm, tail
7.5 to 15cm

**Environmental
temperature:**
50 to 70°F
10 to 21°C

The Environmental Animal Sanctuary & Education (EASE)

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Environmental
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The EASE Guide to Caring for CHINCHILLAS



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Chinchillas make lovely pets and are very social animals requiring much time and attention. They have a long lifespan of up to 20 years and may well require veterinary treatment. All of this must be taken into consideration before deciding to take on chinchillas as pets.

A Home for your Chinchillas

Chinchillas are best kept indoors in rabbit hutches or cages, and the bigger the home you can provide for them the better. The area where they are housed should be dry and between approximately 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit (10-21°C) with good ventilation but away from draughts and out of direct sunlight.

Chinchillas need a small, enclosed sleeping area, such as a cardboard box with an entry hole. Use a two-inch layer of wood shavings or other non-toxic material for bedding and to cover the floor. The cage should be thoroughly cleaned and the bedding replaced every week. Chinchillas often choose to use one place in their cage as a toilet, so a small litter tray with non-clumping litter can be placed there to make cleaning easier.

Branches to climb on and tiered ledges at various heights to sit on will be appreciated, and a block of wood or chews to gnaw on will help keep your chinchillas' teeth in good condition.

A dust bath should be provided at least twice a week — the dust can be bought from pet shops and placed in a container that is large enough for the chinchillas to roll around in, which can be most entertaining to watch.

When the chinchillas are settled in to their cage and used to being handled, they can be let out for a run. It is best to start letting them out in a small area with no hiding places until they become used to it. You should be able to pick them up without a chase and, when returning them to the cage, give them a treat so it is a pleasant experience to go back. If it is not easy to get them back, try to entice them with food or simply wait for them to come back to you. If you start to chase the chinchillas they will see you as a predator and you will lose their trust.



Food and Drink for your Chinchillas

Chinchilla pellets will provide most of the nutrition needed and are available from pet shops. Allow about two tablespoons per animal every day and remove any uneaten food daily. Hay or alfalfa is an essential supplement to the diet, and must be stored in a dry place to avoid mould or fungi which can cause diarrhoea. Fresh green vegetables such as broccoli, lettuce or parsley can also be given in moderation. Chinchillas have very sensitive digestive systems and too much watery food can cause problems. Lack of roughage in the form of hay or alfalfa can lead to tooth problems. Treats such as raisins, fresh fruit, carrots and oats can be fed occasionally, again in moderation so no more than a teaspoonful.

When introducing any new foods give only a very little and then wait a few days to see if there are any negative effects before offering any more.

Fresh water should always be available in a drip-feed bottle that is rinsed and re-filled every day. The bottle should be scrubbed regularly to prevent algae building up.



Handling your Chinchillas

A new chinchilla will need a few days to settle into its new home before it can be handled. Start offering it food by hand until the chinchilla is comfortable to climb onto your hand. Always move slowly so as not to alarm it.

To pick up a chinchilla encircle it with your hands and arms, giving it support but being careful not to squeeze as they dislike this. Chinchillas like to be scratched or rubbed lightly around their ears and chin — you can watch to see how they do this to each other. They do not like heavy stroking like cats but seem to not mind being stroked very lightly.

NEVER try to grab a chinchilla by the fur as they have a defence mechanism that sheds their fur if it is caught, and you will end up with a handful of fur and a bald chinchilla!

Chinchillas

In the wild chinchillas are social animals, living in colonies of up to 100, so they should not be kept alone. They often groom each other and will snuggle up together to sleep. They originate from South America where they live in high rocky areas of the Andes, either burrowing where the ground is suitable or occupying cracks and crevices in the rocks.

They are members of the rodent family which means that their teeth grow constantly throughout their lives.

The chinchilla has beautiful, soft fur which has led to it becoming relatively scarce in the wild because of the fur trade.



Chinchilla Body Language

Chinchillas learn behaviour as well as inheriting it so they should be observed to discover the unique behaviour of an individual.

They will make different sounds when in various moods such as excitement or anger which you will get to know over time.

Sleeping on their side: If a chinchilla sleeps on its side, it can mean it is hot, tired after exercise, pregnant or just likes sleeping that way.

Hopping and jumping: This is quite normal behaviour for a chinchilla when it is playing.

Sitting up on back legs: This is a sign of increased alertness and will often happen when there is a noise or something unusual happening around it.

Biting: Chinchillas give a gentle nip to new objects they encounter to find out what it is and whether they can eat it. This will include fingers and anything else that they find.