

Common Guinea-Pig Ailments

The best advice is to consult your vet if you think your guinea-pig may be ill.

Diarrhoea: If it does not rapidly clear up and is accompanied by other symptoms e.g. weeping eyes, nose or mouth, then seek immediate veterinary help. Remove and burn any soiled bedding, and always wash your hands.

Fly strike: Check rear end for infestation and take immediately to the vet if maggots are discovered.

Skin conditions: Scratching a lot or bald patches could be caused by lice, mites, ringworm or hair chewing (barbering). Seek veterinary advice.

Pneumonia: Difficulty breathing, take to the vet for antibiotic treatment.

Pseudotuberculosis: This is spread by mice, rats and wild birds and can be transmitted to people. The symptoms are diarrhoea, weight loss and laboured breathing. Seek veterinary advice immediately.

Enzootic cervical lymphadenitis: Swelling on jaw or neck, take to the vet for antibiotic treatment.

Scurvy (Vitamin C deficiency): Swollen painful joints and a reluctance to move — take straight to the vet.



Guinea-Pig Facts

Guinea-pigs, sometimes also called Cavies, are rodents that come from the grasslands of South America and were introduced by the Spanish conquistadors in the 16th Century. Sailors kept them as pets, and their name is believed to have come from the fact they were sold for a guinea each.

Gestation:
60-65 days

Litter size:
2-4

Maturity:
6-8 weeks and
can breed

**Weaning
age:**
3-4 weeks

**Eyes
open:**
Immediately

**Respiratory
rate:**
42-104
breaths per
minute

**Body
temperature:**
37-39°C

Heart rate:
230-380
beats per
minute

The Environmental Animal Sanctuary and Education (EASE) is a registered charity (no. 1089160) which promotes aspects of the human/companion animal relationship. Our services include the provision of a Preparing for Pet Loss programme and education on animal welfare. For more information about our work, contact:

EASE
PO Box 292 Hatfield
Hertfordshire
AL9 6ZJ
Email: info@ease-animals.org.uk
Website: www.ease-animals.org.uk

Cartoons by
landers
www.landers.co.uk
cartoons@landers.co.uk



**Environmental Animal
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The EASE Guide to Caring for GUINEA-PIGS



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Guinea-pigs are highly active creatures. The low purchase cost must be considered in relation to the potential vet fees and the amount of time needed to groom and handle them to keep them tame.

A Home for your Guinea-Pigs

Guinea-pigs are active creatures that can be kept indoors or outdoors. If they are outdoors the hutch must be draught-free, weatherproof and raised off the ground. Buy the biggest cage you can, and if outdoors provide a run with a roof to prevent predators. Placing a few tunnels in the runs will give the guinea-pigs places to hide and investigate.

Ensure the inside of the hutch is partitioned to make a darker sleeping area that is easy to clean. Hutches should be cleaned at least once a week, and more often if you have more than one. Guinea-pigs need company and unless you are planning a colony make sure they are of the same sex or that the male is neutered. Females easily live together but males can fight so this should be avoided.

Don't place the cage in direct sunlight, in a draught or near a radiator. Place it away from electrical apparatus or any other pets. Guinea-pigs sleep only about 4-6 hours at night and are very talkative, so the bedroom might not be the best place for them.

Clean the cage with rodent disinfectant which is available from the pet shop, and spread a layer of wood shavings, hay or shredded paper on the floor. Do not use sawdust, nor newspaper as the print is poisonous, nor straw which can cause eye problems.



Grooming your Guinea-Pig

Guinea-pigs need regular grooming, and daily grooming if they are long-haired. Their claws need to be inspected regularly and clipped if they get too long but care must be taken not to cut them too far back. Guinea-pigs only need bathing for medical reasons e.g. your vet recommends a special shampoo against skin mites.

Food and Drink for your Guinea-Pig

Fresh water should always be available preferably in an inverted bottle and where it can be easily reached. Check **daily** that the water bottles are working by running your finger over the end of the spout. Liquid vitamins such as Vitamin C which is vital to keep guinea-pigs healthy can be added to the water. Guinea pigs' natural diet is grass, so grass and hay should make up the bulk of their diet.

Guinea-pigs eat little and often so make sure that hay is always available and give dry food at least twice daily. Feeding bowls should be sturdy and washed every day. Feed with a base diet of guinea-pig pellets or mix, with Vitamin C which can be obtained from the pet shop. Their diet should be supplemented with green-leaf vegetables and small amounts of fruit such as apples, kiwi, tomatoes, broccoli, cabbage or freshly-picked grass. Spinach is also good, as is lettuce in small amounts. Frozen foods should not be fed.



Handling your Guinea-Pig

Guinea-pigs are rarely aggressive, although they will be nervous when you first bring them home, so let them explore in peace for two days while you gently talk to them. It will take time for them to get used to you, so begin by putting your hand in the cage and just leaving it there for them to investigate and get used to your scent. Repeat this until they trust you, and then you can start to gently stroke them.

When you pick up a guinea-pig use both hands, with one underneath supporting the animal under the chest and the other on top supporting its hindquarters. Hold it close to you to prevent it wriggling and falling which could be fatal. Once they are used to you, your guinea-pigs will love being handled.

Guinea-pigs appreciate plenty of exercise and like to graze on the grass, but only let them run about in an enclosed run as cats or foxes could climb in and attack them.

Guinea-Pigs

Guinea-pigs are a favourite with children because they are very vocal and tolerate handling well. You'll be amazed at how much they chatter in squeaks, whistles and grunts. They live on average between 4-8 years and so should not be taken on without careful consideration.



Guinea-Pig Body Language

Murmurs, gurgles & grunts: Contentment.

Sitting up or standing up on hind legs: Begging for food.

Hissing & teeth chattering: Aggression, warning the 'enemy.'

Jumping: Happiness.

Touching each other's noses: Greeting and acknowledgement.

Loud squeaking: Pain, fear or loneliness.

Tilting the head at an angle: Signalling strength.