

Glen Mills Veterinary Hospital
1785 Wilmington Pike
Glen Mills, PA 19342
Tel: (610) 558-0100 Fax: (610) 558-0102
Email: info@gmveterinary.com

We are grateful that you have chosen us to help you with your pet's health care. If you have questions concerning any subject related to your pet's health, please feel free to contact us. One of the technicians or doctors will be happy to help you.

GUINEA PIGS

Un-related to the farm-animal pig, guinea pigs are members of the rodent family that are known for squeaking with delight when their favorite humans enter the room. They're very docile, lovable companions that make great pets as long as the appropriate measures are taken to care for them.

HISTORY

Native to the Andes Mountain area in South America, they were first used as a food source and a sacrifice by Andean Indians to Incan gods. They were introduced to Europe in the 1500s by Dutch explorers and were bred by guinea pig enthusiasts. During the 18th century they started making substantial contributions to scientific research. In present day, guinea pigs are a common favorite among children due to their calm, sweet personalities and ease of handling.

HOUSING

Guinea pigs can be housed in a variety of enclosures. Make sure the floor isn't an abrasive material as their skin can be sensitive. Wire mesh cage bottoms are not recommended as broken legs are common in guinea pigs who live in such. Solid floors may be harder to keep clean but they're definitely the safer option. You also want to make sure the cage is big enough for the pig and allows adequate ventilation. The top of the cage can remain open as long as the sides are at least 10 inches high or high enough that the guinea pig can't escape.

Suggested bedding materials are "care fresh" bedding, shredded paper, and commercial pellets. Material that is nontoxic, absorbent, relatively dust-free, and easy to replace are all characteristics of a good bedding. Wood or cedar shavings are not always recommended as they've been reported to cause breathing problems and even liver disease in some.

Guinea pigs are more comfortable when housed in a relaxed, quiet spot in the house. They're nocturnal so keep that in mind when deciding where is the best spot in the house to place them. They also enjoy being housed together as they're very social animals. Males and females can be housed together, however some males can try to become dominant in the presence of a female so make sure they're a good match together. Also keep in mind if your guinea pigs are not spayed and neutered, nature will run its course eventually!

DIET

Guinea pigs and rabbits are similar in the way they eat, meaning they both require good quality, fresh food as well as clean water at all times. Don't get the two confused, however. Rabbit pellets for example do

Sources:

not have the same nutritional value as guinea pig pellets do. Guinea pigs are not like most mammals; they cannot manufacture their own vitamin C and need to obtain it from an outside source. They can receive vitamin C through fresh kale, cabbage, a slice of citrus fruit or red bell pepper, or other dark leafy greens that are high in ascorbic acid. All veggies should still be given in moderation making up about 15% of their diet. Also, limit the pellets to about 1/8 cup per day.

Timothy hay should be the biggest part of a guinea pig's diet—about 75% of their diet. It should be available and fresh at all times, which is another similarity in rabbits. Guinea pigs have sensitive digestive systems and therefore any change in diet should be done gradually. Sudden changes can result in your pig refusing to eat food or drink water which can be very concerning and even dangerous. **Guinea pigs need fresh hay and food at all times. If your pig ever stops eating even for a couple hours, that is an urgent concern and should be addressed by a veterinarian immediately.**

Guinea pigs can be a little messy when it comes to their food bowls and water bottles. They like to chew the ends of the water bottles which clogs the end can get food stuck in it as well. It's very important to keep all containers cleaned and disinfected daily.

BEHAVIOR

Guinea pigs tend to have a language of their own with their incredible voices and quick feet. See our handout on Guinea Pig Body Language for examples of sounds or motions that are translated into human interactions.