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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.

CHINCHILLAS

If you've ever pet a chinchilla, you'd understand the value in their fur. Chinchillas are known for their incredibly soft, silky coat which is very beneficial to them in more ways than just style. Its thickness protects them from fleas and predators as well as keeps them warm. Chinchillas are not an "easy" pet to take care of and should only be owned by experienced pet owners who are very aware of their needs.

HISTORY

Belonging to the rodent family, chinchillas are native to the Andes Mountains of Peru, Chile, and other countries surrounding. Wild chinchillas live in primarily rocky, barren, high altitude areas. They were first domesticated in the 1920s for their furs, otherwise known as pelts. The standard chinchilla fur is a bluish grey color. Regardless of color, it's incredibly silky, soft. There are now more color mutations than the standard including white, silver, beige, and black. Chinchillas that did not have an ideal coat for fur trade were sold to labs for research. Today's chinchillas are commonly bred for pets and pelts.

HOUSING

Chinchillas can be housed in a variety of ways. They're pretty active creatures and should have an adequate amount of space to exercise. They do well in wire mesh cages. Wooden cages are not suggested as chinchillas are known to be chewers. Glass or plastic containers are not suggested either since neither provide much ventilation. The wire cages come in different sizes and are well ventilated. Make sure they're in an area with enough light that is also cool and dry.

Housing more than one chinchilla together is not recommended because they may fight each other. Females are typically more aggressive than males. If you do decide to house a male and female together, you need to make sure the cage is large enough for the male to escape the female if a fight arises. This makes breeding tricky as you can imagine. Breeders usually house females separately and have a male enter each cage on his own through a tube that runs along the back of the females' cages. The entrance to the cage from the tube is small enough that a female cannot enter due to a light-weight collar on her neck that is a little bigger than the entrance.

Sources:

- (1) South Wilton Veterinary Group www.southwiltonvet.com:
"Introduction to Chinchillas" "Chinchilla Housing" "Feeding Chinchillas" "Chinchilla Behavior" "Common Illnesses"
(2) Brown DVM, Susan. "Living With Ferrets" *VeterinaryPartner* 28 April 2008
(3) Quesenberry, Katherine and James Capenter. *Ferrets, Rabbits, and Rodents: Clinical Medicine and Surgery*. Saunders, 2012.

Chinchillas keep their fur clean and groomed using something called a dust bath. Dust baths involve a finely powder volcanic ash in its own bath [tub] to allow the chinchilla to roll all over in it. Baths shouldn't be provided 24/7 but only a short amount of time during the day because otherwise the chinchilla will create an everlasting dust cloud.

DIET

As with any pet, you always want to make sure your chinchilla has fresh, clean water. Chinchillas enjoy drinking from a valve-type bottle or sipper-type bottle. Regarding diet, the majority of a chinchilla diet should be specifically formulated pellets. Not all pet stores sell commercial chinchilla pellets. In these cases, rabbit or guinea pig pellets would suffice in its place.

Hay is also beneficial as it adds fiber to their diet as well as serving as a good chew toy. Similar to rabbits and guinea pigs, it should be provided at all times. Timothy hay is recommended over Alfalfa hay since Alfalfa hay has high calcium content relative to phosphorus. Make sure the hay is as fresh as possible to avoid mold and vermin contamination.

Examples of treats for your chinchilla include dried fruit and nuts. They're known to enjoy raisins especially. Carrots and green veggies can be offered but only in moderation. Try to avoid cereal and bread completely as it's not recommended. Any change in diet should be made gradually in small amounts.

BEHAVIOR

Although chinchillas are known to be docile and quiet creatures, they enjoy climbing and jumping around. They're naturally nocturnal however most can be adapted to being active during the day. In addition to being so agile, they love to chew. All of their teeth grow continuously which is why they chew almost anything. Wooden cages aren't recommended for this reason because they will be able to escape. Make sure to keep wooden toys available for them to chew on.

Just like every pet, chinchillas develop their own individual personalities. Getting to know your chinchilla takes time. Learning your pet's personality and preferences is important to be able to accommodate his or her needs and will help you know when there is abnormal behavior going on.

Handling your chinchilla isn't too difficult. The main thing to be cautious about is 'fur slip' which happens when a chinchilla is handled or grasped too roughly, the fur becomes patchy and sheds. To avoid this, always grasp the base of the tail closest to its body with one hand, while supporting the body with your opposite forearm and holding close to your body. Another way to hold or handle a chinchilla is around the thorax like other rodents. They're known to be super friendly but are able to bite if they get irritated enough.