



# Guinea Pig Care

## A Proper Guinea Pig Diet:

Every guinea pig needs this daily:

- Fresh **water** always available.
- **1/8 cup of quality pellet food per day**, per guinea pig. Oxbow brand has excellent quality guinea pig food. Use Oxbow Adult Guinea Pig Food for guinea pigs over 6 months old, and Oxbow Young Guinea Pig Food for guinea pigs under 6 months old.
- **Unlimited Timothy Hay** for guinea pigs over 6 months old and unlimited Alfalfa Hay for guinea pigs under 6 months old.
- **Vitamin C:** Guinea pigs cannot manufacture their own vitamin C. While many guinea pigs receive adequate vitamin C from fresh vegetables and pellets, you may wish to ensure your guinea pig gets adequate vitamin C by giving them a chewable vitamin C tablet. Oxbow brand makes a great quality vitamin C tablet that you can purchase at most pet stores. Often pet stores will try to sell you liquid vitamin C supplements to put in your guinea pig's water, but guinea pigs often do not like the smell and taste and then will not drink their water. This is why we recommend using the chewable tablet over the liquid drops.
- **Fresh Vegetables** - about ½ cup to 1 cup of raw veggies a day. See list below of recommended veggies.



## VEGETABLES:

### LEAFY GREEN VEGETABLES that can be given daily

- Cilantro
- Parsley
- Red leaf lettuce
- Green leaf lettuce
- Romaine
- Dandelion greens



### LEAFY GREEN VEGETABLES to give occasionally but not daily

- Spinach

- Mint leaves
- Basil leaves
- Endive
- Kale
- Escarole
- Dill leaves
- Radicchio

### **NON LEAFY VEGETABLES & FRUITS to give only occasionally.**

**\*Only give one small piece/slice of these as they are high in sugar and can cause digestive issues.**

- Carrot
- Red and green bell pepper
- Apple
- Strawberry
- Banana (remove peel)
- Blueberries
- Cucumber
- Mango
- Raspberry
- Zucchini
- Tomato



### **NOT RECOMMENDED IN DIET:**

- **Avoid commercial treats** that are marketed for guinea pigs (example: yogurt drops) which can be detrimental to their health. Consuming these empty calories (many contain fat, sugars, and even excess calcium) can result in decreased consumption of the basic foods, like hay, that they really need. Feeding them a piece of fruit here and there will serve as a treat for them and be much healthier than the processed fatty treats found at pet stores.
- **Avoid iceberg lettuce** because it has less nutritional value than other leafy greens and is mostly water, which may result in loose stools if given in excess.
- **No multivitamins.** Plain vitamin C is fine, but multivitamins are not. Excessive amounts of fat soluble vitamins like A and D are often in multivitamins and can cause serious problems for your guinea pig.
- **Do not feed wilted or spoiled food.** New kinds of vegetables must be introduced slowly, to avoid digestive issues. Once introduced, you can supply a variety of them to your guinea pig. Variety is the key to maintaining your guinea pig's health.



### **GI Stasis: A Deadly Condition**

When considering guinea pig health, it is important to note that guinea pigs tend to hide signs of illness because they are prey animals. In the wild, sick animals are pinpointed by predators first. This self-preserving instinct to hide illness lives on in domesticated guinea pigs, so it is critical to continually monitor your guinea pig for any changes in behavior.

One very serious, fairly common health issue that pet guinea pigs face, is gastrointestinal stasis, known as GI Stasis. GI (or gut) Stasis is a potentially deadly condition in which the digestive system slows down or stops completely.

Since guinea pigs cannot vomit, bad bacteria then builds up in the intestines and releases gas into the system, causing very painful bloating and further decreasing their motivation to eat or drink. This compounds the problem because the piggy will become even more dehydrated and starved of essential nutrients.

The contents of the digestive tract will become more compact, and the guinea pig will have an even more difficult time passing it through. The bacteria can also release toxins into the system which overtax the liver and can cause the organ to ultimately fail.



### **Causes of GI Stasis in Guinea Pigs**

The slowdown of the digestive system can be caused by:

- A high starch, low fiber diet
- Stress (from losing a bonded mate, a change in environment, etc.)
- Pain from underlying issues (dental problems, gas, etc.)
- Lack of exercise

### **Signs of GI Stasis**

If your guinea pig is demonstrating any of the symptoms below of GI stasis, **bring him/her to a small mammal vet immediately:**

- Small and/or malformed fecal pellets
- No fecal pellets
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy / hunched posture

### **Treatment of GI Stasis**

When you bring your guinea pig to the vet, your vet will try to determine the cause of the slowdown. If there is an underlying condition, it is imperative to address it. The vet may take x-rays to assess the blockage and the presence of gas. If the vet has determined that the best course of treatment is to stimulate motility in the gut, he/she may administer the following:

- Motility drugs that can help stimulate movement in the digestive system
- IV fluids which help soften the mass in the intestines
- Pain medication to alleviate discomfort due to gas buildup



- Syringe feeding of Oxbow Critical Care (see picture to the left) to ensure the guinea pig continues to get essential nutrients
- Antibiotics to combat the overgrowth of harmful bacteria (used with caution because antibiotics can also disrupt the presence of good, essential bacteria in the digestive system)



It is also important to provide plenty of fresh hay and greens for the guinea pig, should he/she get the urge to eat. Providing particularly fragrant greens, like cilantro, may help entice a piggy who is not overly eager to eat.

With these treatments, time, and patience, a guinea pig suffering from GI Stasis can make a full recovery. But it is important to recognize the symptoms early and take your guinea pig to a small mammal vet immediately for these treatments.

### How to Prevent GI Stasis

There are several measures you can take to help prevent the occurrence of GI stasis. First, ensure your guinea pig is getting a proper hay-based diet. A hay-based diet is essential not only because it provides the fiber necessary to keep the digestive system moving, it also helps wear down a guinea pig's teeth which paves the way for better dental health.

Another way to prevent this condition is to bring your piggy in for regular veterinary checkups. After examining your guinea pig, a vet may be able to detect underlying health issues that your piggy has so far successfully hidden from you, such as infections or dental problems.



Third, evaluate your guinea pig's living space. Guinea pigs need plenty of room to exercise. They do best when they are included in family life, but they are prone to high stress levels when there are major changes to their environment and routine, such as the loss of a bonded partner or an influx of household visitors. So do your best to create a happy and healthy environment for your guinea pig.

## Housing For Health and Happiness:

### THE ENCLOSURE

A smooth solid bottom cage (**avoid wire bottom cages where the piggies can catch their feet and get injured easily**). If separation from other household pets is not an issue, an open-topped enclosure may allow you to interact with and pet your guinea pig more easily (as seen in picture to the right).

A small **house/hut or box** inside the cage will provide a sense of protection for your piggy and a place to sleep.

**Not Recommended:** Aquariums and plastic tubs are much too small and have poor ventilation. This type of housing isolates the guinea pig from its surroundings by limiting sight, sound, and smell.



## SIZE OF ENCLOSURE:

Provide as large of a cage as possible. An “extra large bunny rabbit” cage is usually closest to the appropriate size, if looking for a cage with a top. You can get plastic bottom cages with wire tops at pet stores or online.



You can also get a more elaborate enclosure with an open top, like what is shown in the picture to the left, from this website:

<https://www.guineapigcagesstore.com/>

## LOCATION:

Choose a bright draft-free room with a stable temperature range between 65 and 75 degrees fahrenheit, out of direct sunlight, and situated close to household activities. The more your guinea pigs are part of your daily lives, the happier you will both be.

**Do not** house your guinea pig outside. Temperature fluctuations can be very hard on your guinea pigs. Predators might also break into cages. A guinea pig indoors will likely feel safer and more comfortable.

## BEDDING & LITTER BOX:

You can use fleece and blankets to cover the cage floor. Place a corner litter box or rectangular litter box (pictured to the right) in one or two of the corners with aspen wood shaving, paper shavings, or hardwood fuel pellets in it. If using wood shavings for the litter box, **aspen wood** is

recommended. **Do not use cedar or pine bedding**, as this can cause respiratory failure in guinea pigs which is fatal.

The bedding in the litter box must be different than what is covering the rest of the enclosure so that the piggies can learn where the litter box is and begin to use only that corner.

A few brands of good quality paper litter that is safe for guinea pigs are Carefresh, Oxbow, Kaytee, and Living World. Make sure the paper bedding is **NOT** scented, as this can cause respiratory problems for your piggies.



You can also use hardwood fuel pellets that come in 40 pound bags at Menards or Fleet Farm for under \$10 (pictured to the left).

Changing the fleece/blankets and also dumping out the litter box every couple days will prevent odors and promote good health for your guinea pigs.

**\*Remember to always have hay in the litter box. A healthy guinea pig should eat a pile of hay about the size of their body every day. It is very important that they always have hay available since hay is at least 80% of their diet.**



## TOYS:

Guinea pigs teeth never stop growing and constantly have to be worn down. Chewing on hay is what mostly wears down their teeth. However, cardboard boxes and paper towel rolls (without the paper towel, so just the cardboard roll) make excellent toys that can both cause amusement for your piggy and wear down their teeth as they chew on it. It is also okay for them to digest cardboard; this should not cause them to get sick.

You can also purchase apple and willow wood sticks from a pet store or online for your piggy to chew on and help wear down their teeth.



### **WATER BOTTLE & FOOD BOWL:**

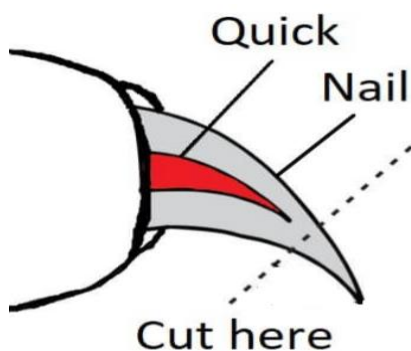
Provide a water bottle that can attach to the side of the cage, and a small, heavy ceramic dish for pellet food. The heavier the bowl, the harder it will be for your piggy to flip over.

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## **Nail Care:**

Guinea pig nails are constantly growing. Some grow straighter while others have a tendency to curl and lie to one side. Their nails will probably need to be trimmed **about every 8 weeks**, or whenever you notice they are getting long and/or sharp.

You can purchase small mammal nail trimmers as seen in the picture to the right.



To avoid trimming the "quick," or blood inside the nail, only clip off the tips of the nails before the red. In darker nails, this can be very difficult to see, so clipping less is better in this case.

Many people do not feel comfortable trimming their piggy's nails. Fortunately, we offer **FREE nail trimmings** for life for small mammals adopted from the Oshkosh Area Humane Society, so just email our Small Mammal Coordinator to schedule an appointment for your piggy to get their nails trimmed.

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## How to Handle Your Guinea Pig:

Guinea pigs are gentle animals with delicate bones, so it is important to learn how to hold and carry them safely.

### **Handling Technique:**

Support the entire body. Wrap one hand securely around the chest/middle region of your guinea pig. Use your other hand to support the hind feet and rump (as seen in the picture to the right).

**Tip:** Some pet owners return their guinea pigs to the cage rump first to try to prevent injuries from them jumping back into the cage.

### **Warning:**

Very young children should not be allowed to carry a guinea pig. They may squeeze too tightly or accidentally drop the piggy, leading to possible injury.



## Grooming a Guinea Pig:

### **Brushing:**

Guinea pigs are known to be extremely clean animals who will constantly groom themselves so that you rarely need to help them. However, guinea pigs with longer hair will need to be brushed on a more regular basis, especially during spring and fall when they often shed more in preparation for their summer and winter coats.

### **Bathing:**

G-pigs do not need baths as they are constantly cleaning themselves. The only time you should bathe your guinea pig is if they are special needs, elderly, or you have been advised to by



a veterinarian.

## One Pig or Two?

**Make it two!** Guinea pigs are extremely social and thrive in the company of another pig. If you have to be away for a large part of the day, it is even more important to get a pair of guinea pigs. You will end up with happier piggies this way.

A few of the advantages of having bonded piggies:

- More exercise:** Two or more pigs means space needs to be shared, claimed, or discovered. A little jostling keeps them on their toes. And piggy trains are fun to watch.

- Better diet:** Sometimes a new pig is unfamiliar with the foods you provide. Watching a resident pig devour a favorite food encourages a new pig to give it a try.



•**Happiness:** Even the rare pig that prefers its own cage will likely appreciate having a nearby guinea pig companion. While not all pigs will find a soul mate, most are very happy to know they are not the only pig in the house. More than one guinea pig means more fun for you and more fun for your guinea pig!



**Compatibility:** It is a common myth that two male guinea pigs cannot be bonded. Compatibility between two guinea pigs is determined by the personalities of the individuals rather than their gender. Some guinea pigs will fight with any pig you try to pair them with, but the vast majority thrive on the company and enjoy having a cage companion. The easiest match is usually between two babies or a baby and an adult guinea pig, but adults can be paired up successfully as well!

**Fun Fact:** In some countries it is actually illegal to adopt just one guinea pig, since they are such social animals!

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### **Small Mammal Vets in Fox Valley Area:**

(Rabbits, guinea pigs, rats, & mice)

- **Animal Medical Center of Appleton (Dr. Chris Barber and Dr. Keri Weyenberg)**  
322 N Metro Drive  
Appleton, WI 54913  
(920) 749-1717
- **American Animal Hospital (Dr. Megan Mutchler)**  
1230 Commercial Street  
Neenah, WI 54956  
(920) 725-8522
- **Birch Bark Veterinary Care (Dr. Jennifer Cyborski)**  
1055 Truman Street  
Kimberly, WI 54136  
(920) 738-7700
- **North Heights Veterinary Clinic (Dr. Laura Russo-Klister and Dr. Nicki Schaetzl)**  
1001 W Northland Ave  
Appleton, WI 54914  
(920) 729-7816



- **Appanasha Pet Clinic (Dr. Pat Laritson)**

1205 Wittmann Drive

Menasha, WI 54952

(920) 725-8307

**Outside of Fox Valley Area:**

- **Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital and Exotic Care**

14850 W Lisbon Rd.

Menomonee Falls, WI 53051

262-781-5277

- **UW-Madison Veterinary Care: Special Species Services & Exotics**

2015 Linden Dr.

Madison, WI 53706

608-263-7600



***Thank you for choosing and supporting the Oshkosh Area Humane Society!***

***Questions? Suggestions? Concerns?***

***Please feel free to reach out to our Small Mammal Coordinator, Sarah, at [sarah@oahs.org](mailto:sarah@oahs.org)***