

# Keeping Chinchillas As Pets



## Chinchillas:

Attractive, sociable and highly active animals, Chinchillas need plenty of space, time and attention. They originate from South America and can live for more than 15 years - so choosing one as a pet is a long-term commitment. For this reason they are considered an unsuitable choice as a child's pet. They need at least an hour of daily exercise outside their cage and are at their most active during the evening and at night. Chinchillas can be kept singly but are happiest in same-sex pairs or groups.

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### Duty of Care:

Every owner has a duty of care towards their animal. People should not take on the responsibility of keeping a pet unless they have the means to provide it with appropriate care and attention. This includes providing specialist treatment in the case of sickness or injury to prevent unnecessary suffering. Owners should arrange for their animal to be taken to a vet as soon as it becomes ill and be prepared to pay for any treatment themselves.

## Housing

Chinchillas bred in captivity should be kept indoors as they can't withstand extremes of temperature. An ideal cage size for a pair of Chinchillas is approximately 85 x 100 x 40cm. You may also consider adding a separate run in the garden or allowing your pets some daily supervised exercise outside their cage. Chinchillas love climbing, so place platforms, ramps, and perches at different heights inside their cage.

Your Chinchilla's home should be kept out of direct sunlight and away from draughts.

A bed should be provided for sleeping and snoozing – a wooden box or a dark tube filled with shredded paper is ideal. The cage should be cleaned once a week - a small litter tray can be provided to help maintain a hygienic environment for your Chinchillas.

## Feeding

Chinchillas are natural herbivores, surviving on fibrous, dry vegetation in the wild. A specially prepared Chinchilla pellet food makes an ideal core diet for your pet along with plenty of fresh hay. Very small quantities of fresh vegetables may also be given as an occasional treat – be careful as they can cause stomach upsets. The hay supply should be replenished each day and ensure fresh drinking water is always available. Like all rodents, a Chinchilla's front teeth grow continuously, so provide them with something to gnaw on – a fruit tree branch is ideal. Raisins or sultanas are perfect to offer as treats to your Chinchilla.

## Looking after your Chinchillas

### Exercise & Entertainment:

Most active during the evening and night, Chinchillas like routine and should be given at least one hour of daily exercise outside their cage. Evening is the ideal time for this as your Chinchilla will be at its most active. They enjoy climbing and playing with toys but ensure they are supervised – they like to explore everything with their teeth first!

### Handling:

With patience, Chinchillas can become very tame. Using raisins or sultanas as a treat, you can gently encourage your pet to come closer. Stroking it under the chin will help it feel at ease although do not try to catch it straightaway. You can pick up a Chinchilla by supporting its body in your hand whilst gently restraining it at the base of the tail. Never pick a Chinchilla up by the tail – this can cause serious injury. If your Chinchilla sheds fur, this means you are handling it too roughly.

### Breeding:

Keeping Chinchillas is a long term commitment and they can breed quickly given the right conditions. You should therefore seek expert advice before considering keeping a breeding pair and only if you're certain you can find good homes for the babies.

## Tips for a happy healthy Chinchilla

### Community:

Chinchillas can be kept alone but like most rodents, prefer the company of their own kind. Two or more Chinchillas of the same sex should get on well. If males and females are mixed, males should be neutered to prevent breeding. To introduce a new Chinchilla, place them in separate cages within sight and smell of each other, placing their beds at opposite ends (as far away as possible). Swap their sand baths over daily so they get used to each other's scent. Gradually move the cages and beds closer together and after a week or so, they should be happy to share the same cage.

### Health:

A Chinchilla must be provided with a sand bath for daily grooming. This is essential for keeping its dense, luxurious fur in good condition. Chinchilla sand is available from most pet shops and the bath should be about 25cm deep with plenty of room for the Chinchilla to move around. The sand should be changed about once a week.

As with all pets, if you are worried about any aspect of your Chinchilla's health, seek veterinary advice. For a healthy life, your Chinchilla needs the following:

- A good balanced diet with no sudden changes
- Clean dry housing, cleaned once a week with a mild disinfectant
- No extreme or sudden changes in temperature
- Water bottle and feed bowls cleaned daily
- Gnawing block or fruit tree branch to help wear their continually growing teeth
- Daily 20 minute sand bath
- At least one hour of daily exercise outside their cage