

Common Health Issues

Bumblefoot:

A condition caused by a bacterial infection, causing the foot to swell. Seek veterinary advice immediately.

A hard stomach and difficulty breathing:

This is usually Bloat and can be fatal. Usually caused by overfeeding of 'greens', veterinary attention will be required as soon as possible. Immediately remove all food and bedding but ensure plenty of fresh water is available.

Rapid breathing:

If your Guinea Pig is breathing rapidly with its nostrils wide open it usually indicates heat exhaustion. Always ensure your pet has a shaded ventilated section in a run or hutch.

Overgrown claws:

Domestic Guinea Pigs will probably need their claws clipping from time to time.

You should obtain professional advice and a demonstration from your veterinary surgery before attempting this procedure yourself.

Runny eyes:

Usually caused by dust in the wind or from hay. Wipe the eyes gently from inner to outer corners with cotton wool soaked in warm sterile water (boil water and allow to cool off). If eyes are red and swollen immediate veterinary attention is required.

Diarrhoea:

Often caused by lack of fibre or over-feeding with greens. Hutch should be cleaned and disinfected twice daily and bedding changed. Give your Guinea Pig plenty of fresh water and hay. Consult your vet if the symptoms continue beyond 24 hours.

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.

Keeping Guinea As Pets

Guinea Pigs:

Guinea Pigs are inquisitive, friendly animals that enjoy being handled and rarely bite or scratch – making them ideal pets for young children. They are active during the daytime, they are fun to watch and play with, and they communicate vocally, with different noises having different meanings! They originate from South America and live between 4 and 8 years. Males are known as boars; females as sows. They like company and, as with all pets, should be treated gently – they can be nervous creatures.



Housing

Your Guinea Pig can be kept indoors or outdoors all year round. They do not like sudden loud noises so it's best to position their hutch in a quiet position. A wooden hutch is ideal although a wire cage can also be used provided it is fitted with a plastic floor to avoid injury. Your hutch must be weatherproof with a separate nest area for each Guinea Pig and plenty of dry bedding - shredded paper or wheat straw are ideal but do not use fluffy bedding. A louvered door can be fitted over a wire door to offer protection in cold weather. Two Guinea Pigs should ideally be housed in a hutch or cage around 120 x 60 x 45cm. If using a smaller hutch, consider adding a separate run in the garden or allow your pets some daily supervised exercise outside their cage.

The hutch should allow shade during the heat of the day and shelter from strong winds. A grass run can be built into the hutch or located elsewhere in your garden – again with a nest area protected from the sun.

Keeping Guinea Pigs and Rabbits together in the same hutch is not recommended. They have different requirements and unless you have previous experience of keeping both pets together, they should not be mixed.

Feeding

Guinea Pigs are natural grazers so they should be given plenty of fresh clean hay along with a quality Guinea Pig mix or pellets twice a day (note, Rabbit food is not suitable). Guinea Pigs lack the enzyme that produces vitamin C so it's important to supplement their diet with small quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables - melon, oranges, and dark green leafy vegetables are all good sources but, as with Rabbits, care should be taken not to overfeed. You can also buy vitamin C to add to your Guinea Pig's water – this is recommended. Fresh drinking water should always be available from a gravity bottle, and food should be given in earthenware bowls – Guinea Pigs will chew plastic!

Looking after your Guinea Pig

Exercise & Entertainment:

Give your Guinea Pig as much floor space as possible – at least 900 sq cms – and provide them with an outdoor run. Guinea Pigs are not usually interested in toys, but may enjoy exploring cardboard boxes, tubes, or pipes, helping them feel safe, secure, and 'hidden' which in turn helps reduce stress. Hiding small amounts of food around the hutch is a fun way to keep them alert and active. They can also be allowed to run indoors under supervision but be sure to keep cats and dogs out of the way.

Handling:

Young Guinea Pigs are nervous creatures and should be allowed to gradually get used to their surroundings – and to you. For the first few days, talk gently to your Guinea Pig to build up trust, then slowly introduce your hand into the hutch. Your Guinea Pig will become inquisitive and more confident around you. After a week or two, try picking up your pet using both hands. Place your thumb across its shoulders with your fingers wrapped gently around the ribs; place your other hand beneath the hindquarters for support. This is a good time to start grooming your Guinea Pig – something which should be done daily.

Breeding:

Guinea Pigs can actually breed from 30 days, but to ensure healthy babies (and parents) it is recommended that males are not mated until 6 months; females 10 months. Pregnancy lasts 60-65 days, producing a litter of 3-4 babies. Young Guinea Pigs can be weaned at 3-4 weeks. Always seek expert advice before considering keeping a breeding pair.

Tips for a happy healthy Guinea Pig

Community:

Guinea Pigs are sociable creatures so it's best to keep a compatible pair or group - two young from the same litter (same sex) or a mother/daughter, father/son combination. Neutering and spaying will prevent unwanted litters and fighting. We do not recommend keeping Rabbits and Guinea Pigs together as their requirements are very different.

Health:

A healthy Guinea Pig will be alert, have bright eyes and a shiny coat. Breathing should be quiet and regular. If you are worried about any aspect of your pet's health, seek veterinary advice. For a healthy life, your Guinea Pig needs the following:

- Your time and attention - they love company
- A good balanced diet with no sudden changes
- Clean dry bedding changed daily
- 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 blocks and chew toys to help wear their continually growing teeth
- Daily grooming – especially for longhaired breeds