



Monticello Animal Hospital

Crista Wallis, DVM

22026 W. 66th St.
Shawnee, KS 66226

Office: 913-422-0301
Fax: 913-422-0302

info@monticello-animal-hospital.com

Care & Feeding of Guinea Pigs

General Information:

Guinea pigs are among the cutest pets that people own. They are members of the rodent family and originate in South America. They are also known by the name 'cavy' which derives from the scientific name Cavia aperia. Guinea pigs are born fully haired, eyes open and ready to run! Adult pigs often weigh over 2 pounds and obesity is a common problem. Life expectancy ranges up to 9 years with 3 – 6 being the average. Guinea pigs become sexually mature at 4 weeks so it is important to separate the sexes. They make great pets for adults and children alike and enjoy the human-animal bond.

Housing:

Guinea pigs are very active pets so buy the largest cage possible. There are cages that are specifically made for guinea pigs that do not have wire on the cage bottom. This is an important feature as guinea pigs can get their feet caught in the wire and break a leg very easily. Fresh bedding should be used and changed 2 – 3 times a week, depending on the number of pets you keep. Carefresh is an excellent product for this purpose. It is a newspaper based bedding that is soft and absorbent. You can also use newspaper or other paper based product(s). Cedar, aspen and pine shavings should be avoided because these products can cause eye, nose, respiratory and feet irritations.

Guinea pigs enjoy playtime and run and jump with obvious enthusiasm. They like tossing toilet paper rolls and even some small dog toys around. Providing tubes to run through and little houses to hide in help keep you pet content.

Feeding:

Guinea pigs prefer using a water bottle rather than a bowl if given the choice. Water bowls tend to get full of litter and debris quickly so keep this



Monticello Animal Hospital

Crista Wallis, DVM

22026 W. 66th St.
Shawnee, KS 66226

Office: 913-422-0301
Fax: 913-422-0302

info@monticello-animal-hospital.com

in mind when purchasing your equipment. Grass hay, such as Timothy or brome should be fed in abundance each day. Pelleted foods can be offered in moderation, approximately ½ cup daily. One important side note to remember: alfalfa is the 'candy bar' of food, too much alfalfa can cause urinary tract or gastrointestinal problems as well as obesity.

Guinea Pigs have a unique dietary need. Because they can't synthesize vitamin C, their diet must be supplemented. If they do not get enough vitamin C they will develop scurvy. By feeding small amounts of fresh dark greens (turnip greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, kale, Brussel sprouts, carrot tops) and fruits, your pet will have a well balanced diet and avoid this problem. Remember, the darker the green vegetable, the higher the vitamin C content. Many guinea pigs also enjoy eating oranges, which are full of vitamin C.

Diseases:

Sniffing, sneezing, wheezing, runny nose...

These signs are typical of an upper respiratory tract disease. Other signs may include blood stained crusts around the nose, discharge from the eyes or difficulty breathing. Common causes include bacterial infections, allergies, irritation due to inhalation of smoke, fumes or odors from cedar/pine shavings. Medication or correction of the environment can be used to help treat your pet.

Scratching, hair loss...

Some scratching is a normal function of grooming; however, if the places being scratched are becoming red, irritated, raw or the guinea pig is losing its hair, then the scratching is considered excessive. Your guinea pig could have skin mites, lice, fleas, a bacterial infection or a fungal disease, such as ringworm.

Overgrown teeth

Guinea pigs teeth grow continuously throughout their life. If the incisors (front teeth) or molars (back teeth) do not meet evenly it is called malocclusion. The teeth do not wear down when the guinea pig chews resulting in overgrowth. Malocclusion is usually caused by a congenital deformity of the jaw. Other causes can be injury or trauma to the teeth or jaw and infections in the tooth roots. Overgrown teeth can cause mouth



Monticello Animal Hospital

Crista Wallis, DVM

22026 W. 66th St.
Shawnee, KS 66226

Office: 913-422-0301
Fax: 913-422-0302

info@monticello-animal-hospital.com

infections, ulceration of the inner surface of the cheeks or tongue and inability to pick up or eat food. Guinea pigs may show an interest in food but seem unable to eat, drooling seen as wet fur around the neck and mouth and weight loss are all signs to watch for in a guinea pig with overgrown teeth. Overgrown teeth need to be trimmed periodically throughout the life of the guinea pig. If the molars are involved, or if the guinea pig is skittish, a general anesthetic may be required.

Loss of Appetite

Guinea pigs usually eat constantly and metabolize food very fast. So if an illness or other conditions are preventing them from eating, they rapidly lose weight and become seriously debilitated in a short period of time. Any illness, from vitamin C deficiency to overgrown teeth can cause a guinea pig not to eat. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your pet stops eating.

Diarrhea

Diarrhea is very serious in guinea pigs and shouldn't be allowed to go more than 24 hours without consulting your veterinarian. Diarrhea can result from feeding your guinea pig a new type of vegetable or an unusually large quantity of fresh vegetables, a bacterial overgrowth in the G.I. tract or certain medications.

Scurvy

Guinea pigs must have vitamin C in their diet. Like humans, they are not able to manufacture vitamin C in their body. If the diet is deficient in vitamin C, signs of scurvy rapidly develop. Common signs include loss of appetite, poor hair coat, weakness, lameness and generalized pain.

Blood in the Urine

Bloody urine may appear red or brown. This may indicate an infection of the bladder or kidneys, bladder stones or problems with the clotting ability of the blood. Other reasons for abnormal color of the urine include muscle damage, diet and the concentration of the urine. Normal urine color ranges from white to dark yellowish brown, is cloudy and thick.

If you have any questions or concerns about your guinea pig, please do not hesitate to contact us! Enjoy your guinea pig!