



# DAVID VELLA

## exotics vet

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## GUINEA PIG CARE

### Vital Statistics

Life expectancy	5 - 8 years	Weaning	3 weeks
Breeding	2 - 3 months	Pregnancy	59- 72 days
Litter size	1 - 10	Adult body weight	700 - 1200g

Guinea pigs are sometimes referred to as '**Cavies**'. They are a rodent animal native to South America. They can make ideal pets due to their small size, ease of care & quiet nature. They can become very used to handling, especially if started at a young age. They are often very vocal animals exhibiting a range of calls. There are many different breeds of guinea pigs including the short haired Abyssinians and the long haired Peruvians.

### Housing

- Guinea pigs can be housed in a range of cage types. Provide a cage as **large as possible** (minimum dimensions for one guinea pig is 1m x 0.5m x 0.25m high)
- Guinea pigs do not tolerate heat very well and are **vulnerable to heat stress**. Ensure that the area that they're kept in will not become too hot
- Their enclosure should be **well ventilated**. Regularly change their bedding to avoid ammonia build up
- If kept outdoors, make certain that the cage is **predator proof**
- Suitable bedding materials include shredded paper and hay or straw
- Provide **overturned boxes** for 'hiding' places (at least one per guinea pig)
- Use at least **2 dripper type water bottles** (in case one becomes blocked), as water bowls are more likely to become soiled
- Guinea pigs are **sociable** animals and should not be kept alone. They can be housed in colonies.
- Mixing **guinea pigs with rabbits is not recommended** as guinea pigs can get diseases from rabbits

### Handling

- Guinea pigs can usually be handled quite easily. Pick them up by placing your hand(s) under them & be sure to support the full length of their body
- Be sure to **wash your hands** after handling your guinea pig. It is also wise to ensure that your hands don't carry odours of other animals before you handle your guinea pig as this may frighten them

### Feeding

- Guinea pigs are **herbivores**. Their teeth grow continuously throughout life
- They are naturally 'coprophagic' meaning that they eat some of their own droppings
- They should be offered a **wide variety of food types** from a young age as they can potentially become 'addicted' to their usual foods & not be open to trying new food types
- Guinea pigs should be offered a constant source of **grass or grass hay**, eg; **Timothy, Oaten, Wheaten, Pasture, Paddock, Meadow or Ryegrass hays**. (Not Lucerne or clover hays as they are too high in protein and calcium). This is paramount in providing the 'complete' diet and encourages 'chewing' for long periods of time. Fresh leafy green vegetables & herbs should also be offered. Some examples of these include;  
**Vegies**: broccoli, cabbage, celery, endive, beet/carrot tops, brussel sprouts, spinach leaves, Bok Choy/other Asian greens, dark leafed lettuce varieties  
**Herbs**: parsley, dandelion, coriander, basil, dill, mint etc
- Some high quality 'Guinea Pig' pellets should be offered (min 16% fibre content), in small quantities only, not ad lib - a high quality product is Oxbow Cavy Cuisine.
- Guinea pigs require a dietary source of **Vitamin C**. This is usually supplied sufficiently by the fresh leafy green veges
- It is safer to supplement this with small quantities of vitamin C rich foods such as citrus or kiwi fruits
- **No-Nos!** (these should not be offered to pet guinea pigs). Cereals, grains, nuts, seeds, corn, beans, peas, breads, biscuits, sweets, sugar, breakfast cereals, chocolate!
- Any dietary changes should be made gradually

### Health and Veterinary Care

- Have newly acquired guinea pigs checked by a vet, especially if you intend to mix it with others! Thereafter have them checked regularly (at least annually)
- Coats may require **regular grooming** & nails may need occasional clipping
- At home you should always monitor closely your guinea pigs food intake, body condition, eyes, ears, mouth, feet & toileting behaviour