

Guinea Pig Diet

Grass Hay

Guinea pigs are herbivores and in their natural environment grasses are the most important part of their diet. Grasses are abrasive to the teeth, which is why the guinea pig evolved teeth that grow throughout their life. The molars are particularly adapted to grinding up tough fibrous materials. Grasses also provide a variety of nutrients as well as indigestible fiber, which helps keep the intestinal tract moving at a normal speed, and digestible fiber that is used by the bacteria in the cecum to produce such things as vitamin B and amino acids.

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should be available at all times. The guinea pig can eat as much as he/she wants. You can use any grass hay, including timothy, orchard grass, brome, and others. Avoid alfalfa, which is not a grass but rather a legume (like peas and beans) and is too high in calories and some nutrients such as calcium and protein.

While the hay can be provided in a hay feeder or on the bottom of the cage, putting it in a basket or cardboard box can provide enrichment for the guinea pig.



Vitamin C

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Unlike most mammals, guinea pigs cannot produce their own vitamin C so it must be supplemented daily in their diet. The amount of vitamin C required by adult guinea pigs is about 20-25mg daily and up to 30-40 mg daily for pregnant guinea pigs. Probably the best and healthiest way to provide vitamin C is by offering vegetables rich in vitamin C, such as bell peppers (red, yellow and orange are best), parsley, kale, dandelion greens, mustard greens, collard greens, and broccoli leaves. Carrots and lettuce are not good sources of vitamin C. Fresh produce with high Vitamin C content should be offered at 1 cup daily.

Always thoroughly wash all fresh produce to avoid exposing your pet to pesticide residues or bacterial contamination.

Other sources for vitamin C supplementation include vitamin C tablets (Oxbow makes a tablet for guinea pigs) or flavored liquids for children (for example Childlife Essentials Vitamin C for Kids Natural Orange). Pelleted guinea pig diets are supplemented with vitamin C, however it is very unstable. Fresh pellets lose about ½ of the vitamin C content due to degradation within 6 weeks of manufacture. Vitamin C drops added to water is not an adequate source either since the vitamin breaks down

within a few hours. For this reason, it is recommended to provide supplemented vitamin C to the diet. Websites with good vitamin C information include <http://www.veterinarypartner.com> Small Animal Health Series; Vitamin C Supplements for Guinea Pigs and <http://www.guinealynx.info> which has a calculator for Vitamin C.



Food Bowls and Water

Food should be offered in a dish suspended an inch or two above the bedding. Food offered on the bottom of the cage may be soiled by droppings or urine. Heavy ceramic bowls are recommended because they resist tipping and chewing. Guinea pigs are very finicky and may refuse food if the type of food or the container is changed. Any change in the diet should be made gradually.

Fresh, clean water should always be available in sipper bottle or a heavy crock that prevent spillage and should be changed daily. Do not add any medications or vitamins to the water as it will change the taste of the water and promote bacterial growth. In addition, many vitamins are inactivated shortly after they are exposed to air, water, and light. If the taste of the water is disagreeable the guinea

pig may not drink as much. Not drinking enough water can result in dehydration and disease, such as kidney disease and kidney or bladder stones. It is very important that all food and water containers be cleaned and disinfected daily.

Pellets

There are complete pelleted diets formulated for guinea pigs. However, these diets were developed for guinea pigs that were used in research. The diets support maximum growth rates but probably are not ideal for longevity, gut function, and overall health.

While a growing pig (less than 4 months old) may be fed unlimited pellets, it is advisable to limit the pellets of adults. *Adults should be restricted to 1-2 tablespoons of pellets daily*; otherwise, they may become obese. Use guinea pig pellets that are grass-hay based, not

alfalfa based. Also, do NOT feed diets that have dried fruits, seeds, and other additives.

As previously discussed, the guinea pig's intestinal tract is highly specialized for digesting fiber. When inadequate fiber is given, intestinal motility is reduced, the wrong types of bacterial flora proliferate, and toxins may be produced. Impactions, diarrhea, dental disease, enterotoxemia, and other disorders may result from the excessive feeding of grains (i.e. pellets, seeds, cereals, and breads). Additionally, pellets have higher levels of protein and calcium than is

necessary for adult guinea pigs. Do NOT feed rabbit pellets as a substitute for guinea pig pellets. Unlike rabbits, and most mammals for that matter, guinea pigs require a high level of folic acid and vitamin C. Guinea pig diets are uniquely formulated with these requirements in mind, whereas rabbit pellets are not.



Treats

Foods to be avoided are the high starchy foods such as peas, beans, corn, nuts/seeds, cakes, cookies, cereals, grains, breads, etc. Other foods that can be offered in very limited quantity are those that are high in sugar and carbohydrates, such as carrots and fruits. These foods create an imbalance

in the normal bacteria in the intestinal tract and can lead to serious disease. You can offer *one* baby carrot or *small* piece of fruit daily at the most. However, 2-3 times weekly is probably a healthier frequency.

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*Quality Medicine in a
Caring Environment*



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Foraging

Foraging for food is one of the most natural behaviors and provides great enrichment for pets. Most mammals will spend a good portion of their day looking for food. Try hiding food around the cage, in the bedding or exercise area so the guinea pig has to forage for the food. Put the hay

or fresh food in places such as hidden in little crumbled pieces of paper, empty toilet or paper towel rolls, or non-toxic baskets. Offer pellets in a small hollow plastic ball with holes larger than the pellet. As the guinea pig rolls it around, the food falls out and he/she gets to eat. It

provides exercise and stimulation. You do have to take care that the guinea pig is eating and getting adequate nutrition. Be careful not to overfeed.



Our Mission

All Creatures Animal Hospital is dedicated to providing progressive medicine in a caring environment for pets of all species. Through preventative medicine, client education, professional development of our staff, and advanced medical and surgical techniques, we hope to foster a strong and lasting bond with clients and their pets.