

Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

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Guinea Pig Diet

-Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM

Guinea pigs are strict herbivores and need fiber to keep their gut moving. Fiber is best provided by feeding hay – a variety of hays such as timothy, oat grass, orchard grass, brome, or mixed selection. The clinic has several of these hays in stock for purchase.

Alfalfa hay can be used as well for guinea pigs under 6 months of age. Use in older pets may contribute to weight gain. It can be used in small quantities as a treat food in guinea pigs older than 6 months. In pregnant and nursing guinea pigs, or those recovering from illness, feeding some alfalfa hay may provide higher nutrition as directed.

Hay is necessary for digestive system health and also may prevent obesity, dental disease, diarrhea and boredom. It takes longer to eat, and the guinea pig must do a lot of chewing, there by helping to keep the teeth from overgrowing.

Pellets made of timothy hay can also be fed in moderation. Pellets should contain a stabilized vitamin C. Guinea pigs require daily vitamin C supplementation. This can be through the pellet, or easily by the addition of parsley, dandelion, cabbage or kale as the fresh foods. Supplementation can also be done using chewable vitamin C (for humans) tablets, dissolve 50 mg in water or apple juice and give directly in mouth or sprinkled on the fresh food. Supplementation with the fresh greens should be about ½ cup per 1 kg guinea pig (2.2 lbs body weight). Too much fresh greens can lead to diarrhea and gastrointestinal system upset so don't go overboard even though your cavy will let you know he/she would like more!

A pelleted diet for guinea pigs should not have seeds, corn or nuts in it. Feeding seeds such as sunflower seeds has led to cecal (cecum part of the lower gastrointestinal tract and site of most digestion) impaction in guinea pigs. They also tend to select food items instead of eating the pellets.

Treats: The main purpose of a treat should be to promote interaction between yourself and your guinea pig. It should not be thought of as nutrition but rather as “candy”. Too many treats and the guinea pig may refuse his/her regular diet of hay, pellets, greens. Treats such as Oxbow Pet Products Timothy, Veggie and Barley biscuits are a great way to encourage interaction. These treats are actually nutritionally beneficial to your cavy. We carry these but frequently sell out so please call ahead. Other treats can be small pieces of bib, red/green leaf, or romaine lettuce. Some guinea pigs also regard small pieces of cucumber as a treat.

Dedicated to serving the health care needs of birds and exotic companion animals.