

Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

Holly G. Carter, BVetMed

12930 NE 125h Way, Ste B130, Kirkland, WA 98034

Ph: 425-821-6165 Fax: 425-821-6130

info@evergreenae.com

www.exopet.com

Guinea Pig Faqs

-Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM

Behavior: Cavies make great pets. They are non-aggressive and rarely bite or scratch. If frightened, they may run around the enclosure at a fast pace which makes them difficult to catch. Try slowly moving your arm in the caging and talking softly to calm the guinea pig rather than causing stress by chasing it. Happy guinea pigs (particularly youngsters) jump straight up in the air, a behavior called “popcorning”.

Diet: Hay is the largest portion, guinea pig specific pellets with stabilized vitamin C, and some fresh greens, particularly those high in vitamin C (cabbage, kale, parsley, dandelion) should be offered daily. Please see Guinea Pig Diet information sheet. Cavies have sensitive gastrointestinal tracts and do not do well with abrupt changes in feeding patterns, dietary items, or even changes in the brand name of pellet. Any changes need to be done gradually. Feeding bowls should be completely changed daily as the cavy may sit in the dish and urinate or defecate. Sipper tubes should be thoroughly cleaned daily (use small brush or large pipe cleaner) as cavies often spit back food material into the tube.

Housing: Enclosures made of wire with large mesh with minimal dimensions of 24” X 24” X 12” high. Some commercial housing may have a ramp with a shelf that increases the floor space. Breeding females require double the space. Bedding should be provided in abundance: composite recycled paper materials, pellets, shredded paper, hardwood shavings. Bedding must be changed frequently to prevent buildup of wet bedding from urine, and feces. A hide box is appreciated for sleeping or retreat. Guinea pigs should not be housed with species that carry a type of bacteria called *Bordetella bronchiseptica* as asymptomatic carriers: rabbits, cats, dogs) as it can cause severe disease in the guinea pig.

Preventive Care: Be sure your guinea pig is receiving enough vitamin C daily (15-25 mg/kg body weight). Toenails should be trimmed regularly and feet inspected for swellings or irritation. Teeth should be checked: front teeth are all that is visible without a veterinary visit – these teeth should meet properly. Weigh your guinea pig at least monthly. The adult weight should not vary. Weight gain or loss is not normal and the cavy should have a medical visit. Your guinea pig should have a physical exam including dental check at least annually.

Quick Facts:

Physiologic	
Life Span	4-8 yrs
Adult male body weight	900-1200 g (0.9-1.2 kg)
Adult female body weight	750-900 g (0.75 – 0.9 kg)
Rectal body temperature	101.5-103 degrees F
Diploid number	64
Food consumption	60 grams (2 oz) food per kilogram body weight/day
Water consumption	100 mg/kg body weight/day
Respiratory rate	42-104 breaths per minute

Heart Rate	230-380 beats per minute
Blood volume	70 mls per kilogram body weight
Blood pressure	80-94 systolic
Dentition	All teeth are open-rooted (grow continuously). 1/1 incisors, 1/1 premolars, 3/3 molars. No canine teeth
Male = boar, Female = sow	
Puberty (male)	9-10 weeks of age
Puberty (female)	6 weeks of age
Breeding onset (male)	600-700 grams (3-4 months of age)
Breeding onset (female)	350-450 grams (2-3 months of age)
Estrous (heat cycle)	15-17 days
Estrus (when accepts the male)	1-16 h (average 8 hours)
Gestation period	59-72 days (larger litter, shorter duration)
Cycling description	Polyestrous with spontaneous ovulation
Postpartum estrus	Fertile, 60-80% results in pregnancy
Litter size	1-6 (average 3-4)
Birth weight	60-110 grams
Young development	Precocial
Lactation	Peaks by day 5-8 after parturition (birth). Lacks milk by 23 days
Weaning age	150-200 grams body weight or 14-21 days of age
Breeding duration (commercial)	1.5-4 yrs (4-5 litters)
Milk composition	4% fat, 8% protein, 3% lactose, 83% water, 16% solids

Breeding and Raising Young:

The first breeding should be done with the sow younger than 6 months of age, before her pelvic symphysis fuses (may make birth canal not able to stretch during birth). If the birth canal is too small, the sow may have problems with the birth and require a C-section. A sow may double in weight during pregnancy. It is very important that breeding guinea pigs are not obese going into pregnancy or during. The onset of birth may be hard to determine as a sow does not make a nest. Pregnant sows should be separated from other cavies until the litter is weaned, as adult pigs may inadvertently trample the very young. However some breeders have great success housing 2-3 females and 1 male together along with offspring, as long as there are cage furnishings that allow hiding. Babies are born precocial: full body hair, eyes open, ability to eat solid food within the first day. They look just like miniature adults. The sow suckles young in a "standing" position. There are two primary types of breeding colonies. Monogamous: 1 boar and 1 sow kept together. Remove weanlings at 21 days so boar doesn't breed to offspring. Usually the male does not bother the babies. Polygamous or harem: 1 boar to 2-10 sows. Optimal production. Remove weanlings at 21 days so boar doesn't breed to offspring. Problems with large harems: stampeding in heavily populated housing, may trample young; older offspring remaining in group may nurse to recently freshened sows (just starting lactation, just given birth) depriving the neonates. Prevent this from happening by removing juveniles or alternative remove sow and litter to a separate cage a few hours after birth (subsequent to the postpartum breeding).

Pregnancy Prevention in the Home:

If you own both sexes of guinea pigs in your home and do not plan to breed, then it is recommended that the males be neutered. Neutering is an easier surgery (on the guinea pig) than is an ovariectomy (spay).