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GUINEA PIG HUSBANDRY

HOUSING

The largest cage that you can afford and have room for is ideal. Cage bottom should be solid Plexi-glass, hard plastic or stainless steel. Wire mesh bottoms should NEVER be used for a guinea pig because their feet could get caught and they may be seriously injured. Bedding should consist of a paper pulp product (like Carefresh or Yesterday's News), newspaper or computer paper. Go to <http://www.guineapigcages.com/> for some great cage ideas. Guinea pigs can be housed together if they are of the same sex. However, you must watch for fighting, especially in males, because they may not always get along with each other. Female guinea pigs should never be housed with males after six months of age if they have never had a litter of babies. At this age, the pelvic bones can fuse and can prevent the babies from being able to be delivered. A cesarean surgery would be needed to fix this problem and it is a high risk procedure for both mom and newborns.

DIET

Timothy hay should make up the majority of the diet and guinea pigs should have access to fresh hay at all times. Timothy based pellets and greens are a good supplement to the diet. Sugary treats, such as yogurt drops, can cause excessive gas in the intestines and lead to serious health problems. Give approximately, 1/8-1/4 cup daily of pellets daily (www.oxbowhay.com) is more than adequate for most guinea pigs. Fresh water should be available at all times and it is important to clean the water bottle/bowl daily to prevent excess bacteria. Greens that are lower in calcium are a good choice for guinea pigs some examples are: red and green leaf lettuce, escarole, watercress, clover, Swiss chard, bok choy, endive and romaine lettuce. Small pieces of apple, orange, or carrot can be offered as treats. Avoid kale, dandelion greens, collard greens, turnip greens/tops, mustard greens, and broccoli due to their high calcium content. **Vitamin C is an absolutely essential portion of a guinea pig's diet.** The most reliable way to give vitamin C is to use a vitamin supplement administered by mouth. Greens and veggies do not contain enough vitamin C to prevent a deficiency and associated diseases. Vitamin C products that are placed in the water are not reliable because it is inactivated by light and the supplement promotes bacterial growth in the water. Pellets fortified with vitamin C are available, but processed in this way; the vitamin C is stable for only 90 days after milling. Check to see if your pellets have a "mill date" on the bag.

VETERINARY CARE

It is essential that a guinea pig go the veterinarian routinely. Yearly exams are recommended to help identify underlying problems before they get worse. Overgrown molars are a common problem in guinea pigs that can be easily treated. A guinea pig that is "picky" or does not like hay may in fact have a medical problem. As mentioned above, vitamin C deficiency is very common in guinea pigs. Signs may include a rough coat, decreased appetite, swollen or painful joints and ribs, reluctance to move, poor bone and tooth development, spontaneous bleeding from the gums, crustiness around the eyes and respiratory infections. Other problems commonly seen in guinea pigs are respiratory infections, external parasites, bladder stones and foot sores (pododermatitis). If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call our office at 240-687-1414.

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