

## FEEDING YOUR PET GUINEA PIG

### Common problems

Guinea pigs come from Central and South America, where they have been reared as food animals for thousands of years. Wild guinea pigs feed on grass and other low growing vegetation – hence they require a diet high in fibre, and also a plentiful supply of vitamin C because, like us, they cannot manufacture vitamin C in their own body, and so must have it provided in the diet.

Guinea pigs that are deficient in vitamin C will often show signs of illness within a couple of weeks. Young animals that are lacking in vitamin C grow slowly, and move reluctantly because of pain in their joints. In adult guinea pigs deficiency will increase the likelihood of skin or respiratory disease, and poor healing of wounds.

### How to avoid trouble

To be sure of providing your guinea pig with a correct diet you should feed it one of the mixes made specifically for guinea pigs, because they include vitamin C at the correct level. You must also be sure that good quality hay is available all the time.

All the members of our veterinary practice who keep guinea pigs use “Burgess Supa Guinea” and find it very good indeed. The other brand we recommend is “Pets-at-Home Guineapig pellets”. Most of the other 'rabbit and guinea pig' mixes available are too low in protein to be ideal for

guinea pigs, are low in fibre, and do not contain any additional vitamin C.

Guinea pigs like to graze out-doors during summer, and they will get plenty of vitamin C from the grass while is actively growing. However, greens such as cabbage and kale, which are also enjoyed especially during winter when they cannot graze outside, are **not** a significant source of vitamin C.

### Fibre is important!

Guinea pigs should never be without hay to eat. If there isn't roughage available, they will 'barber' each other, chewing' their companions' fur as a source of fibre.

It's also best to use hay instead of straw as bedding because guinea pigs burrow in their bedding. The sharp ends of straw quite often cause eye injuries, whereas hay is softer and less likely to cause damage.

Sometimes a guinea pig needs extra vitamin C but will not eat the supplement-ed food. In this situation the vitamin C has to be given either in the food (perhaps on a slice of apple, or some other moist food, the guinea pig enjoys), or else in the water. Guinea pigs need about 50 mg of vitamin C a day to remain healthy - rather more if they are pregnant or feeding young.

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