

Common Illnesses

Eye Problems – Healthy eyes are clear and sparkling. If there is any discharge or the eyelids are inflamed and sore, it may be that there is irritation or infection that must be treated with medication from a vet.

Ear Problems – If your chinchilla is pawing its ears, or you notice discharge, or there is a lack of balance and direction, you should take your chinchilla to the vet. Once home, do not allow your chinchilla to have a dust bath until it is well again.

Runny Nose – Discharge from the nose may mean that your chinchilla has a cold. Keeping him warm and ensuring that he drinks a lot of fresh water should clear the problem. If the condition deteriorates, take your chinchilla to the vet.

Mouth Problems – Chinchillas are rodents. This means that their teeth grow continuously throughout their life. It is very important to ensure that chinchillas always have something to chew and gnaw on to help wear down their teeth. If teeth become overgrown, the chinchilla may be unable to eat properly so it may lose weight and become weak and, therefore, more susceptible to illness. Indicators that teeth are too long may be dribbling from the side of the mouth when eating, pawing the mouth, or weight loss as long teeth will prevent the chinchilla from eating properly. It may be necessary to take your chinchilla to the vet to have his teeth trimmed if they have become overgrown.

Coat Condition – Chinchillas have dense fur and there are very few instances of mites or other parasites. The exception is a fungus. The fur can look limp and messy and, in some cases, the whiskers break. You will need to take your chinchilla to the vet who will probably prescribe a fungicidal powder to put into your chinchilla's dust bath.

Pneumonia – If your chinchilla is wheezy, finds it difficult to breathe or has a runny nose, it may have a chest infection or pneumonia. You need to take your chinchilla to the vet immediately as pneumonia puts a lot of stress on their bodies and can be fatal.

Constipation – Constipation is often caused by stress, a change in diet, or lack of water. If your chinchilla has constipation you will often notice a lack of droppings and that he looks tired and bloated. You can help relieve this by ensuring that there is plenty of fresh water and hay available. Also ensure that he is getting enough exercise. If necessary, offer the dust bath more frequently. If you are unhappy, always consult your vet.

Diarrhoea – Diarrhoea is quite common. It is usually an indicator that the chinchilla (especially a young one) has over-eaten or that it has eaten bad hay or food. This condition can also be caused by stress, a sudden change in diet, or too much green food. Your vet will be able to advise on treatment.

Always consult a vet if you have ANY reason for concern.

Chinchilla Profile

<i>Latin Name:</i>	<i>Chinchilla lanigera</i>
<i>Female:</i>	Doe
<i>Male:</i>	Buck
<i>Young:</i>	Kits
<i>Life span:</i>	10-20 years (domesticated)
<i>Litter Size:</i>	1-2 kits
<i>Birth weight:</i>	30 - 40gms
<i>Eyes open:</i>	At birth
<i>Gestation period:</i>	111-113 days
<i>Average weight:</i>	Male 400-500gms Female 400-600gms
<i>Sexual maturity:</i>	4-12 months
<i>Weaning age:</i>	8-10 weeks
<i>Diet:</i>	Omnivorous

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If you would like any more information on Charlie Chinchilla or any other products in the Supreme range, please contact us:


Supreme

Supreme Petfoods Ltd
Supreme House
The Briars
Waterberry Drive
Waterlooville
Hampshire, PO7 7YH

Tel: (023) 9236 9000
Fax: (023) 9236 4800
E-mail: russel@suppet.co.uk

www.russelrabbit.com



Charlie's Guide to Chinchillas




Supreme

Introduction

This leaflet includes information on how to care for your chinchilla including feeding, housing and common illnesses.

Chinchillas are very shy but lovable animals and deserve consideration and commitment when being looked after as a pet, especially as they can live for many years.

History of Chinchillas

Spanish pioneers discovered the chinchilla in the 16th Century when they were kept and used by the native Incas and Chincas for food and clothing. Chinchillas were later brought to Europe where their pelts became fashionable and widely used for clothing. This demand for chinchilla pelts almost made them extinct but, fortunately, in the early 20th Century, a miner called Mathias F Chapman captured 11 chinchillas and bred them in captivity, servicing the demand of the fur trade, but also securing survival of the species.

The name Chinchilla means "little chinta".



Colours/Patterns/Markings

There are two types of chinchilla:

The *Chinchilla lanigera* – with a pointed nose and angular face and the *Chinchilla brevicaudata* – that is larger than the lanigera with thicker neck and shoulders but a shorter tail.

All chinchillas have thick, dense fur. Through selective breeding, there is a wide range of coat colours. These include Silver, White, Platinum, Black Velvet, Sapphire, Rose/Apricot, Chocolate Brown and Albino.



Nutritional Requirements

The chinchilla has a very sensitive digestive system that has evolved through the frugal high fibre diet of grasses, fruits, leaves, bark, roots, stems, insides of cacti and available bugs and grubs.

Chinchillas need lots of fibre so hay should be available to your chinchilla at all times. This is essential to keep the digestive system healthy and also to help wear down their continually-growing teeth.

The chinchilla diet must be very low in fat and they should never have sunflower seeds or peanuts in their diet. They can easily become overweight if they have too much fat and, over the long term, it can be fatal.

Feeding Your Chinchilla

Charlie Chinchilla

Charlie Chinchilla is a complete diet specially formulated for chinchillas. It is a mix of ingredients, including alfalfa pellets, alfalfa stalk, wheat extrusions, flaked peas, flaked maize, raisins, carrots and soya so it is high in fibre and low in fat. **Charlie Chinchilla** does not contain any sunflower seeds or peanuts as, although chinchillas love them, too many can be bad for them (high in fat). However, the variety of textures and tastes included encourages foraging which is natural for chinchillas and provides dental exercise that is good for their teeth.



Supreme Science – Selective

Supreme Science – Selective can be fed to chinchillas who are picky eaters. In every mouthful there is the correct nutrition to meet chinchilla's nutritional needs. The food contains lots of fibre (19%) that helps to keep your chinchilla's teeth in trim and maintain healthy digestion. There is also a "prebiotic" that expels harmful bacteria and maintains healthy gut flora.

Supreme Choice Hay

Hay is a vital component of a chinchilla's diet to aid digestion and help wear down its teeth. Choose a good quality hay, such as **Supreme Choice Hay**, which is dust extracted to prevent health problems.

Changing Your Chinchilla's Diet

If you are not feeding **Charlie Chinchilla** or **Supreme Science - Selective** food but would like to try one of them, you must introduce it gradually into your chinchilla's diet. Mix about one quarter of the new food with three quarters of the old food on the first day and then gradually increase the new food and decrease the old food over a 10-day period. This should make sure that your chinchilla has no tummy upsets.

Charlie Chinchilla Cracker Treats

Chinchillas really love these treats that have been specially made to stimulate their taste buds. Each box contains 3 delicious varieties of crispy nuggets made from carrot, apple or maize. These special, low-fat biscuits make an ideal treat for your chinchilla.



Ensure there is fresh drinking water available at all times.

Looking After Your Chinchilla

Housing

Chinchillas need to be kept indoors and careful thought must be given to where your chinchilla's cage will be kept. The temperature in the room should be constant, away from direct sunlight and draughts, and out of reach of any other pets.

Chinchillas need good, secure, roomy housing with a sleeping compartment. They should be kept in a large wire cage with a plastic base. Buy the largest one you can afford because they will spend most of their long lives in this cage. Never keep chinchillas in a wooden hutch as they will gnaw their way out. The minimum sized cage for a pair of chinchillas should be 30" long x 30" wide x 36" high (75cm x 75cm x 90cm).

Don't forget they will need somewhere to use their **Charlie Chinchilla Bathing Sand** every day as well.

You need to put the cage in a room where there is a constant temperature which must NOT reach more than 80° F (27° C) as they will become stressed and could even die. In the UK, chinchillas should never be housed outside because of the fluctuations in the climate.

Cage Hygiene

Bedding Material

Russel Bedding is made from the highest quality barley straw, chopped for extra comfort. It fluffs up to provide a natural, warm bedding that is ideal for your chinchilla. Because it is completely natural, **Russel Bedding** is safer than some other types of bedding. It is also treated with a non-toxic cleaning agent to eliminate pet odours, germs and bacteria, and has been specially processed to ensure it is free of dust as many animals are allergic to dust.

Supreme Choice Woodshavings

A high quality, fresh bedding which is highly absorbent and dust extracted. Available in a compressed pack and is good value for money. It is perfect for the base of your chinchilla's cage.

Supreme Science – Carefresh

Alternatively there is **Supreme Science – Carefresh**, which is even more absorbent than traditional bedding and eliminates pet odours. It is dust free and hypo-allergenic and is, therefore, particularly suitable if your chinchilla has any sort of allergy or respiratory illness. It is safe and hygienic and heat treated to inhibit bacteria and fungi growth.

Charlie Chinchilla Bathing Sand

Chinchillas must not be bathed in water as their coats absorb water and are very difficult to dry out. Water in the fur may cause hypothermia which could prove fatal.

Chinchillas should have a sand bath every day. Place a high-quality sand, such as **Charlie Chinchilla Bathing Sand**, into a high sided box or cat litter tray in their cage, and let your chinchillas roll around in it. They will thoroughly enjoy themselves and the sand will help to keep their coats healthy by removing excess oils. Always remove soiled sand immediately, and change all the sand once a week.



Exercise

Your chinchillas will love running around and playing. They will love safe branches to climb on and gnaw, as well as platforms. You can make some tunnels out of drainpipes or terracotta chimney liners. Flower pots are great for hiding and exploring and cardboard or wooden boxes give them something to hide in that they can chew as well. Hide some small pieces of food or treats in their play area to encourage foraging.

Chinchillas are naturally very active and inquisitive animals. They like to keep themselves busy and, when allowed, spend the majority of their time running around and investigating their surroundings. If you have a "chinchilla-proof" room, they will love this large space to explore and run around in. Check out the '**Furry Fun**' accessories range from Supreme Petfoods.

Handling Your Chinchilla

Always approach your chinchilla on the same level. Crouch in front of him and let him come to you, presenting the back of your hand for him to sniff. Gently put your thumb behind the forelegs with your fingers over his back and lift with one hand whilst supporting the weight of the chinchilla by scooping up the rump with the other hand. Gently place your chinchilla on to your lap or hold against your chest. Never pick him up by his tail.



Companionship

It is better to keep at least two chinchillas together, as they do enjoy companionship. However, you must ensure that certain rules are adopted before you buy two or more.

You must have a cage that is large enough to accommodate more than one chinchilla. Chinchillas should never be kept in single sex pairs as they will fight – sometimes to the death – but you could put two cages next to each other.

You can only keep a male and a female together, but this obviously results in litters. However, chinchillas are not prolific breeders and only have one or two kits at a time.

Both need to be young and reared together (but from separate litters) or they need to be kept in two cages to begin with and very gradually introduced to each other before they can be put into the same cage.