

## Common Illnesses

Guinea pigs are generally hardy animals, but there are some ailments that can befall them:

**Dental Problems** – as all rodents, guinea pigs' teeth continue to grow throughout their life. Guinea pigs require a high fibre diet to ensure the teeth are evenly worn and to prevent overgrowth. If the teeth are not worn, they grow incorrectly, leading to discomfort, abscesses, anorexia etc. Indication of dental problems may be saliva around the mouth, chest or front paws, and an inability to eat or teeth grinding. Seek veterinary advice if you are at all concerned.

**Abscesses** – can be caused during knocks or fights, or even by food that is sharp and has injured the mouth. You will be able to feel a hard lump. It is best to move the guinea pig into an area of its own and take him to the vet as soon as possible, so the abscess can be treated.

**Skin Complaints** – Guinea pigs are prone to skin conditions. Perhaps the most common is mange. Mange is caused by a little mite that burrows into the skin surface. You will notice little raised spots on the skin that can become "scurfy". Your guinea pig will scratch these itchy areas which will develop scabs and cause its hair to fall out. It is important that you take your guinea pig to the vet for treatment.

**Flystrike** – flies are attracted to guinea pig droppings, either in the hutch or around the rear end of the guinea pig. Fly eggs will hatch into maggots and will initially feed on the droppings and will then burrow into the guinea pig and eat its flesh. This will result in discomfort, pain and, often, death. Avoid flystrike by removing droppings regularly from the hutch, grooming your guinea pig daily and ensuring good ventilation to the hutch as this will prevent flies becoming attracted to, and then trapped in the hutch. Spray **Keep It Clean** in the hutch and on bedding to deter flies and eliminate bacteria. Seek veterinary attention immediately if you suspect flystrike.

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

## Guinea Pig Profile

Latin Name:	<i>Cavia porcellus</i>
Female:	Sow
Male:	Boar
Young:	Piglets
Life span:	5-8 years
Litter Size:	1-6 piglets
Birth weight:	70-100gms
Eyes open:	at birth
Gestation period:	59-72 days
Average weight:	Male & Female 750-1000gms
Sexual maturity:	45-70 days
Weaning age:	3 weeks
Diet:	Omnivorous



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

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# Gerty's Guide to Guinea Pigs



**Supreme**

## Introduction

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

Guinea pigs are very clever and sociable animals and deserve consideration and commitment when being looked after as a pet.

## History of Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs (cavies) originate from South America where the Incas bred them for food. People in Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia still keep guinea pigs, like chickens, for food. The Spanish introduced guinea pigs to Europe in the 16th Century after they conquered the Incas. Wild populations of guinea pigs still exist in South America in a range of habitats including grassland, swamps, forest and rocky areas.

Guinea pigs have the Latin name *Cavia porcellus*, which means "pig-like cavy".



## Colours/Patterns/Markings

Controlled breeding of guinea pigs has led to a wide variety of colours and textures of coats. Cavy colours are classed in 3 sections – Agouti (the hair has several different bands of colour), Self-coloured (one solid colour) and cavies with markings (combinations of colours in marks on the coat).



English Crested

Popular guinea pig breeds include:



Tortoiseshell & White



Roan Abyssinian



Golden Agouti

## Nutritional Requirements

In their natural habitat guinea pigs eat a range of grasses, seeds, weeds, bugs, grubs and fruit. Guinea pigs are often mistaken as herbivores, but they are omnivores and do need protein in their diet to keep them healthy.

Guinea pigs need feeding twice a day, every day (in the morning and in the evening). A good quality, heavy, earthenware food bowl is essential to keep the food dry and clean, and prevent the guinea pig from tipping the food on to the floor of the hutch. Their bowls must be cleaned after every use.

Guinea pigs need a balanced diet of specially formulated guinea pig food, fresh vegetables and hay daily. The guinea pig food must include Vitamin C as guinea pigs cannot generate their own and will fall ill without it. Hay in their diet provides fibre to aid digestion and helps to wear down their continuously growing teeth. A coarse mix, such as **Gerty Guinea Pig** provides all the nutrients your guinea pig needs in one handy bag.



## Feeding Your Guinea Pig

### Gerty Guinea Pig

**Gerty Guinea Pig** is a high quality, nutritionally complete food, which satisfies the specific nutritional and energy requirements through all lifestages (growth, adulthood, pregnancy and lactation).

**Gerty Guinea Pig** contains alfalfa, which is naturally rich in both protein and fibre. Other ingredients include maize, oats, peas and the all-important Vitamin C. It includes the right amounts of protein (for growth), carbohydrates (for energy), fibre (for digestion), oils (for a glossy coat) and vitamins and minerals (for healthy bones, teeth and skin).



### Gerty Guinea Pig Nibble & Squeak Treats

Each box contains a tempting variety of biscuit snacks. Different sizes, shapes and colours allow you to give a tasty and nutritious treat each time.

Ensure there is fresh drinking water available at all times.

## Looking After Your Guinea Pig

### Housing

In the wild guinea pigs live in caves and burrows, spending the majority of time foraging for food. Living in a hutch allows your guinea pig to live outside and receive plenty of sunshine and fresh air every day.

The minimum size for a good hutch is 3ft wide x 2ft deep x 18in high (91cm x 61cm x 45cm). It should be around 4-5 times the length of the guinea pig when it is stretched out. This will need to be much larger if you are keeping more than one guinea pig.

The hutch should be placed in a position that is sheltered and out of direct sunlight. Extremes of temperature can cause stress, which may result in discomfort or illness.

Place the hutch on bricks or legs to avoid becoming damp during wet weather. Ensure the roof is sloping, waterproofed and overhangs slightly to avoid poor drainage on the top surface. Always ensure hutch doors are locked to avoid accidental escape or access by predators, such as foxes.

## Hutch Hygiene

You will need to provide fresh safe bedding for your guinea pig to keep him clean and dry as well as warm and cosy at night.

Hutches should be cleaned out on a regular basis. This is especially important in warmer weather in order to prevent flies being attracted to the hutch, as this may result in an infestation of maggots. In the wetter months, bedding can become damp and mouldy from extreme weather.

### Cleaning Spray

**Keep It Clean** is a cage and hutch cleaner that eliminates pet odours, germs and bacteria (which can harm your pet). **Keep It Clean** can be sprayed on the bedding as well as inside the cage or hutch ensuring that your pet's home is truly clean at all times.

### 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 guinea pig. 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.

### Supreme Choice Woodshavings

A high quality, fresh bedding which is highly absorbent, dust extracted and is available in a compressed pack, giving good value for money.

### Supreme Science – Carefresh

**Supreme Science – Carefresh** 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 guinea pig has any sort of allergy. It is safe and hygienic, and heat treated to inhibit bacteria and fungi growth.

**Supreme Science – Carefresh** absorbs up to 3 times its weight in liquid and lasts twice as long as traditional bedding.



## Exercise

You must provide a run for your guinea pig that allows him plenty of room to exercise every day. Guinea pigs are naturally frightened of large, open spaces but love playing in a run that contains playthings, such as boxes, flowerpots, drainpipes and logs. Security and position are extremely important to avoid any harm or stress to your guinea pig during his playtime.

A guinea pig's natural instinct is to forage, explore and socialise. Mealtimes are always over too quickly and this could mean that your guinea pig might get bored. It only takes a few items to create an exciting environment for him.

Try putting wicker baskets, empty cardboard boxes, chimney pots and large plastic pipes in the hutch as they make great hiding places and excellent tunnels. Hide food in different places and your guinea pig will be forced to find his food – and this helps to prevent him from becoming bored.

Piles of logs (natural wood – willow, beech, hazel or apple) make platforms for them to explore or rest under. Guinea pigs will chew the wood and this will help keep their teeth in trim. Check out the '**Furry Fun**' accessories range from Supreme Petfoods.

## Handling Your Guinea Pig

The best way to pick up your guinea pig is to talk to him as you approach him – 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 place your hand across its shoulders with the thumb behind the front legs on one side. Slowly lift the guinea pig and place your other hand under his rump and then place him on your lap or hold him to your chest and very slowly stand up.



## Companionship

Your guinea pig will love having a companion, but you must have a hutch which is large enough to accommodate more than one guinea pig. It is best to acquire littermates in order to avoid fighting. Female pairs or groups will be fine. Males will live happily together but may become agitated if in the vicinity of females. Females and males will be happy together but will result in litters unless one of the pair is neutered.

Guinea pigs should never be paired with rabbits, as rabbits are naturally dominant and may try to bully the guinea pig or, even worse, attack him.