

Chinchillas

Important Facts

- Chinchillas (chins) live 15-20 years. They have lots of special requirements and they maintain the energy of a puppy throughout their entire lives.
- They are prey animals and they take a long time (weeks, months or even years) to build a bond of trust with their handlers.
- They can be social with other chins but are very selective of their buddies.
- They are most active at dawn and dusk and they sleep during the day. They should not be housed in a bedroom because they are very loud when people try to sleep. A cage kept in an active daytime location may cause the chinchilla to lose sleep and become stressed.
- They need at least an hour of supervised exercise outside of their cage each day. Their play area needs to be “chinchilla proofed” because they chew on everything (wires, plastic, furniture, cabinets, baseboards)
- Chinchillas lack the ability to sweat, so they cannot withstand high temperatures and need to stay in a well-ventilated cage.
- They can't get wet or they can easily get a fungus that is very difficult to get rid of.
- Females spray urine when they are upset

Handling

Chins are very fragile and skittish and should not be carried in a person's arms. They can die if they are dropped from short distances and they will struggle no matter how well they know their handler. If they need to be transported, moving them in their dust house or in a cat carrier is best. If they are squeezed too tightly, their ribs can be easily broken.

Housing

Cage: Needs to be large; at least 24"x24"x36" for one chinchilla. Wires need to be thick and spaced no more than one inch apart. Shelves/bases cannot be made of plastic as they will chew it. Floors and shelves must be solid and should not be made of wire because the chinchilla's feet can become caught and infected. The cage should have multiple levels for exercise and mental stimulation.

Bedding: Towels or fleece blankets can be used as long as the chinchilla does not ingest them. Aspen shavings can be used as well. If fabric is used, the bedding should be taken out and shaken off at least every other day and washed once weekly. If aspen is used, it should be spot-cleaned once daily and completely changed once per week.

Diet

1. At least 75% timothy hay. Hay should be provided at all times and is commonly offered in a ceramic dish, wooden box or terracotta flower pot. Never use clip-on hay racks as chinchillas' feet can become caught in them.
2. About 20% should be made up of pellets. The three brands of pellets most highly recommended are Oxbow, Mazuri and Tradition.
3. Treats should be given sparingly. A pinch of whole oats (or slow-cook oatmeal) or one to two plain cheerios per day are acceptable treats, but aren't necessary. If you'd like to reward a chinchilla, try giving wood chews instead of treats.

AVOID: Fresh and dried fruits and vegetables. Fresh fruits and veggies can cause diarrhea which can be fatal for two reasons: it dehydrates them and gets them wet. **Chinchillas cannot process sugar**, so fruit and veggies are just not a good idea.

Water: Glass bottles typically work best because chinchillas chew through plastic. Chinchillas don't drink a lot of water, so the glass bottle also helps to decrease bacteria buildup in the water.

Dust Baths

- All chinchillas need dust baths at least 3 times per week. The dust bath cleans their coats and is a good tool for stress relief.
- Dust houses, which can be purchased in most pet stores, should be big enough for the chinchilla to fit its entire body and should be covered.
- The best dust brands are: Blue Cloud and Blue Sparkle.
- Never use scented or gritty dust.
- Don't leave a dust bath in the cage at all times. Over-dusting can cause dry, itchy skin. If a chinchilla uses a dust bath as a litter box, fungus can grow and endanger the chinchilla.

General Care

- Monthly: buildup of loose hair needs to be removed from the genitals of male chinchillas.
- Monthly: a chinchilla needs to be weighed. Chinchillas hide illnesses and weight loss is usually the first sign of sickness.

Common Health Issues

- Malocclusion: misaligned teeth that cause serious health problems. Symptoms include drooling, abscesses on the mouth and face, watering eyes, inability to eat, and really long teeth.
- URI
- Fungus (ring worm-type)
- Diarrhea
- Fur chewing: stressed or poorly-bred animals rip their own fur out.
- Heart murmurs

Resources

www.petchinchillas.info

www.chincare.com