

Chinchillas: General Care and Husbandry

Diet

- High quality chinchilla pellets should always be available.
- Timothy or Alfalfa hay should always be available and includes the fiber that is essential for a chinchilla's diet.
- Fresh water should always be available in a stoppered water bottle, not a water bowl (bowls spill too easily). Water should be changed daily.
- Although chinchillas are vegetarians, they **SHOULD NOT** be offered fresh fruits or vegetables because they have very sensitive stomachs.
- Treats can be offered, but only in very small amounts. Unsalted nuts and seeds, and dried fruit without added sugar are good treat options.
 - Raisins are very sugary and should be fed very minimally (only 1-2 weekly). They can be cut up into small bits to feed multiple pieces over the course of a week.
 - Dried rose hips are a great healthy treat option because they are high in Vitamin C and can be offered daily (about 1-2 per day)



Housing/Equipment

- Chinchillas are very active animals that enjoy running, jumping, and playing. Because of this, a large cage with multiple levels is recommended.
- Wire cages with solid floors should be used. Cages with wire floors can cause foot injuries and must be avoided.
- The cage should be kept away from direct sunlight, heat sources, drafts, and humidity because chinchillas are sensitive to these things.
- Bedding material should be provided. Fleece blankets work well, so does pelleted or shredded paper bedding. Avoid using pine or cedar wood shavings because the fumes can cause respiratory problems. Avoid towels or terry cloth because their little claws can get stuck in it.
- Hiding areas are important to provide a place to sleep and feel safe.
- Ceramic food bowls are recommended since they might chew and ingest plastic.
- A hay canister is a good way to offer unlimited hay without creating a mess.
- The cage must be cleaned at least once a week. Chinchillas are very clean animals and do not like to live in a dirty environment

Handling/Enrichment

- Chinchillas can be easily startled, so always let your chinchilla know you are there by speaking to them or letting them sniff your hand. To pick up your chinchilla, use one hand to support his/her chest and the other to support the hind end. Once you have picked him/her up, support him/her against your chest.
- Chinchillas are active and enjoy playing with toys for enrichment. Some good items for play/enrichment include: cardboard tubes (toilet paper, paper towel) filled with hay, gnawing sticks, wooden toys/huts, and bells all can be found at pet stores. Avoid using sticks found outside because they can have harmful bacteria and might have pesticides on them.
- Chinchilla's teeth grow continuously so it is very important to provide wood for them to chew on in order to prevent their teeth from over-growing. There are many wooden chew toys and huts available at pet stores. Chewing hay also helps keep their teeth worn down.
- Chinchillas are very active, and need time to run around outside of their cage daily. This is essential for health and prevents them from becoming depressed and anxious.
 - Always "chinchilla proof" the room before letting them run around. This includes hiding wires, blocking small holes or crevices they might be able to slip through, and removing any objects they may chew on. The floor should have enough traction for them to run and jump, so hardwood or tiled floor is not ideal, carpeted or padded floor is best.
 - If possible, provide an exercise wheel in their cage with a solid floor (not wired) to allow exercise while in the cage.

Health

- Chinchillas maintain their soft coats by taking dust baths. You can find commercial dusting powder and dust bins at pet stores. They should take dust baths at least twice a week. The dust bin should be removed from the cage when done.
- Chinchillas do not need to have their nails trimmed. They naturally keep their nails short by chewing at them and scratching things.
- Remember that a chinchilla's teeth grow continuously and need to be worn down by chewing. Check them regularly to ensure they look normal and healthy.
- Chinchillas can suffer from several health issues such as: diarrhea, poor coat, constipation, lethargy, bloat, ear infection, eye problems. If you suspect illness, contact your vet right away.

References:

<http://chinchillacare.org>
<http://www.chinchillachronicles.com/index.html>