

COSTS AND ADOPTING

Guinea Pigs do not cost a lot in terms of day to day care, however the initial set up and possible veterinary care in future can add up. For initial accommodation a budget of £100-£200 is advised. Guinea Pigs also require a 6 month health check with your vets, where they will have their heart, lungs, teeth and body condition checked over thoroughly.

You must take into consideration potential chronic conditions, for example, a chronic skin condition as this would require ongoing treatment and the cost will add up. Vet checks can also be expensive, as some vets still regard Guinea Pigs as being 'exotic' pets.

Re-homing from Assisi

We are here to guide you through the whole process of re-homing and we prefer you to come up and chat to us first before you go out to buy a hutch or run. That way we can guide you through what you need to buy or even build, so that you do not end up wasting your money on something that is not suitable.

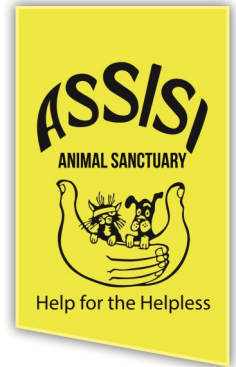
When placing a booking on guinea pigs we like them to go to their new home as soon as possible, ideally within two weeks of placing the booking. We will however hold the booking for up to four weeks as we understand it can take a bit of time to get the accommodation ready.

We are always at the end of the phone if you have any questions and we can be contacted by email at any time!



Guinea Pig Booklet

Some things you need to know ...



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WHAT IS A GUINEA PIG?

Guinea pigs, or Cavies, are a domesticated species of the rodent family. They are classed as 'small animals' and are also classed as 'exotics' by vets. Guinea pigs are strict herbivores and need plenty of forage such as grass and hay.

They are tailless rodents that can weigh between 1-2.5kgs. Their compact, cylindrical bodies range from 8 to 10 inches long.

Their ears are small and petal-shaped and their eyes are set on the sides of their heads. They have small, triangular mouths, which contain 20 teeth. Like other rodents, their teeth grow continuously, and Guinea pigs must chew or gnaw constantly to keep them from growing too long. Guinea pigs are very social and are herd animals. They like to be with others of their own kind, but also thrive from human affection. They are crepuscular, which means they are most active during dusk and dawn. When they are awake, Guinea pigs spend their time feeding, grooming or investigating their cage.

Guinea pigs are herbivores, meaning they do not eat meat. Typically, domesticated Guinea pigs eat processed pellets made from alfalfa hay or timothy hay and vitamins and minerals that Guinea pigs need to be healthy.

Male cavies are called boars and females are called sows. Baby Guinea pigs are called pups. Sows have a gestation period of 59 to 72 days and give birth to litters of three or four babies on average, although they can have as many as 13 babies at one time. Though pups nurse for nutrition, they can also eat solid food as soon as they are born. At three weeks, the babies are weaned, and they are fully mature in two to three months. Guinea pigs live longer than many other small rodents. They typically live five to seven years.



WHAT IS MY GUINEA PIG TELLING ME?

Guinea pigs have a lot to say for themselves but it can be hard for us to work out what they are actually trying to tell us!

Happiness and excitement:

Body language and noises -

- Running around the cage quickly
- 'Popping' These are random leaps and skips round the cage
- Head shaking when accompanied with 'pops'
- Shifting from one foot to another whilst 'rumbling'
- 'Weeps' interspersed with running or 'popping'
- 'Weeps' interspersed with rumbling in quick succession.

Contentment:

Body Language and noises-

- Lying stretched out with head on paws
- Coming over to see what is happening
- Pushing head up when stroked on the nose
- Rumbling when stroked

Unhappiness:

Body Language and noises-

- Sitting quietly showing little interest in anything
- Sitting in a ball with fur fluffed up (could also be a sign of illness)
- Kicking out when you touch their fur (annoyance)
- Wriggling when being held or touched.
- Teeth chattering
- Stiff leg trotting round cage.
- Squaring up to another guinea pig if fighting.
- Circling round with other guinea pigs if fighting.

GUINEA PIG BEHAVIOUR

Guinea pigs communicate through body language, and sounds. They have a wide range of different squeaks, rumbles, and weeps to communicate with both us and other guinea pigs. The different noises tell the other guinea pigs where they are, how they are feeling and whether or not to approach. It is important to get to know what is normal for each guinea pig as any change in their behaviour could indicate illness or just general unhappiness. Guinea pigs are easily stressed, especially while settling in to a new home. It is a good idea to identify possible stressors so that you can make sure they have a nice calm environment while they settle in.



Some things that could stress your piggies out could be:

NOISE- loud noises, banging, children screaming and shouting, barking.

ENVIRONMENT- Strong odours, being unable to see around the area, being kept in a small area, unable to move around freely, household noises.

LACK OF COMPANY- Guinea pigs who are used to having company can become lonely.

INCORRECT HANDLING- incorrect handling can cause pain and distress, then creates a fear of being handled which can then transfer to a fear of people in general.

- ILLNESS- pain and a feeling of being unwell can cause stress.

HEALTH CARE

Guinea pigs are complicated little animals and keeping an eye on their health can be difficult. As they are a prey, animal it is in their nature to hide their illnesses as best they can for as long as they possibly can.

Thankfully guinea pigs are a little better than rabbits at showing when they are unwell, but they still try to hide it for as long as possible. If you ever suspect your guinea pig is unwell you should take it to a vet immediately. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

We know that guineas are creatures of habit so any change in their usual behaviour can be a sign of illness. Even something as subtle as choosing to sleep in a different area can be an indication that something is wrong. It is important that you know your guinea pig inside out so that you can pick up on these small changes in behaviour.

It is very important that you check your guinea pig over daily. You should check their bottom to make sure it is clean and dry, check their face and mouth for any cuts or wet areas and check their fur for any bald or dry patches of skin. It is also important to check around your guinea's home. Have a look at his poops, make sure they are well formed and dry. You must also make sure that he has urinated in all his usual places and that there isn't more or less than normal.

Also remember to check the water bottle at least twice daily. The same amount of water should be drunk each day, give or take a little to allow for very hot or very cold weather. They will drink a little more in both these instances. If you have a good routine set in place for your guinea pig it will be much easier to spot changes in his behaviour than if you don't have a good routine.

If you are ever concerned about your guinea pig's health a Veterinarian should be your first point of contact.

COMMON ILLNESSES AND HEALTH PROBLEMS

Dental Issues

Like most herbivores guinea pigs have teeth that grow continuously. As they chew on hay, grass and other foods the teeth wear down, this helps them keep their shape. Sometimes the teeth can become misshapen or no longer meet (occlude) properly and they begin to over grow. This can be due to an injury to the jaw that can affect the chewing action or simply a diet that does not contain enough roughage or coarse foods.

Any problems with teeth should be treated by a vet as soon as possible. It is a good idea to check your guinea pig's teeth every couple of days. This can be done quickly and easily by just parting the upper lips and pushing the lower lip down. A change in eating habits can be a sign of dental problems, e.g. favouring softer foods over harder, crunchy foods. Sometimes they will paw at their mouths as it can be painful when they eat.

Respiratory Infections

Guinea pigs are extremely prone to respiratory problems. These can be caused by many things including bacterial infections and irritation from hay or bedding.

If you suspect your guinea pig has respiratory issues you need to take him to a vet ASAP.

Signs of respiratory problems include sneezing, nasal discharge, an audible rattle when the guinea pig is breathing and in extreme cases breathing through the mouth. If your guinea pig is breathing through his mouth this is an emergency.



MORE ACCESSORIES

Guinea Pigs LOVE things to snuggle in! Snuggle sacks and Cuddle Cups can be purchased online or in your local pet store! You can even make them yourself!!



GUINEA PIG ACCESSORIES

There are lots of guinea pig toys and accessories you can purchase to keep your piggies occupied!! Guinea pig igloos, or 'Pigloos' as they are known, come in many colours and sizes. These make great hiding places in hutches and runs. They are light and easy for the guinea pigs to position as they like!

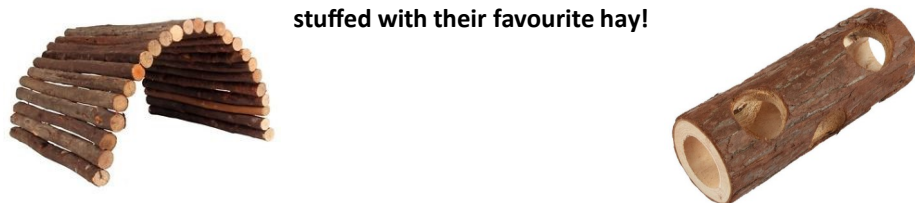


Wooden hiding houses also come in many shapes and sizes. They are a bit more robust and are better for those guinea pigs who like to tip their pigloos over! Wooden houses are good for gnawing on too! There should always be one house per guinea pig as they often like to have their own. Many will squeeze in side by side, but sometimes it is nice to have your own space!



There are lots of other wooden accessories that can be bought either online or in your local pet store! A bridge that guineas can climb over or sit on top of is great!

They can also hide underneath of they prefer! A log with a few holes can be stuffed with their favourite hay!



OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

Abscesses and Lumps

As guinea pigs get a bit older they can be prone to getting strange lumps and bumps. Most of these don't cause problems and are nothing to worry about, but still need to be checked out by a vet. Wounds will quite often appear to heal well and a few weeks later will swell and erupt, leaving the guinea pig with a weeping sore. Some abscesses won't erupt by themselves and will just appear as a large painful lump. Any lump, bump or wound that doesn't appear to be healing should be checked by a vet ASAP.

Mites and Ringworm

Skin conditions are very common among guinea pigs. They are very prone to dry, scurfy skin which can be a sign of mites. Guinea pigs don't cope well when they are itchy, they can become so irritated by it that they can end up having seizures.

If your guinea pig is itchy at all it is important that it sees a vet quickly. Mites most commonly show up as bald, dry, itchy skin along the spine. The guinea pig will not like to be touched on the affected area and may have scratched so much the skin bleeds. Ringworm will also appear as bald, dry skin, but more commonly in random patches over the body or on the ears and nose. It can also be very itchy. You will need to have the guinea pig treated by a vet for both these conditions. NEVER use treatment bought in a pet shop or super market.



DO I NEED TO NEUTER MY GUINEA PIG?

If you have a same sex group or pair then there is no need to routinely spay or castrate your guineas. For a small animal it is quite a big operation and is not without risk. Female guinea pigs may need spayed for health reasons, for example repeat womb infections or cancer. The operation is risky and is not advisable unless it is for the health reasons described. Male guinea pigs may become aggressive towards other male guinea pigs once they reach maturity. Castration can help to calm them down and make it easier to introduce them to another guinea pig, be it male or female. Castration will also prevent them breeding with the females they are in with. Male guinea pigs are fertile for up to 6 weeks following castration, so must be kept away from entire females for this length of time .

Vaccinations

Guinea pigs do not require yearly vaccinations but it is a good idea for them to have 6 monthly or yearly check-ups with a vet. Having regular veterinary checks is a good way of monitoring your guinea pig's health and can flag up any potential problems. As your vet doesn't see your guinea pig on a daily basis they may notice things that you don't.



OUTDOOR ACCOMODATION

The most common outdoor setup for guinea pigs is a hutch and run combination. A good quality hutch can be expensive but it should last for the duration of the guinea pigs life providing it is well maintained. The hutch should have a day area and a closed 'bedroom' area. Hiding boxes and tunnels should also be placed in the hutch to give the guineas plenty of places to hide away.



The minimum requirements for a hutch to house guinea pigs is as follows: 4ft (L) x 2ft (W) x 2ft (H) . Anything smaller will not be deemed suitable. These requirements are set with the guidance from the Animal Welfare Act NI (2011) and also The Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund.



A run is a must for good weather. Guinea pigs LOVE to graze grass. You won't need a lawn mower! You can have the run attached to the hutch to allow them to have free access in and out to the grass as they please. The run will also need plenty of hiding places as guinea pigs cannot see too far in front of them. A suitable run should be around 6ft x 4ft, this will give a pair of guinea pigs ample grazing space.

Example of Indoor Accommodation



Here are a few example of indoor accommodation that can be purchased or made! Above and right we have C+C Cage Accommodation, built with panels, this can be made to whichever size you prefer!! Below is a DIY made open top area with a perspex front so the guineas can see out and you can easily look in!



FEEDING A GUINEA PIG

Guinea pigs need to get their full quota of Vitamin C from the food every day. They are also designed to digest a high volume of food that is nutritionally poor and are just as reliant on hay and grass.

How much you feed will depend greatly on the size, age and health status of the guinea pig. As they require their diet to be rich in Vitamin C they do need to eat more fresh foods than a rabbit does. Forage should be available at all times and they should be able to eat as much as they want.

All forage must be good quality and dust free. Dust will not only make the hay taste foul but it can cause respiratory problems and infections. A variety of hays and dried grasses is always welcome. You can get a number of different types of hays and many will have extra tasty ingredients added such as Marigold or Rose. Dried grass such as Readigrass makes a welcome addition too.

Guinea pigs love their grub, and nothing pleases them more than a big pile of tasty veg! Variety is the key to keeping them interested. Try not to feed the same mix of vegetables each day and avoid giving them too many vegetables from the 'treats' section.

Guinea pig nuggets are fortified with Vitamin C, so providing the guinea pig is a keen nugget eater they will get the right amount of Vitamin C each day from these.

Muesli food is very bad for guinea pigs as they are incredibly fussy and selective, choosing to eat only their favourite bits.

They will never eat a balanced diet when given muesli. Fresh grass is the best sort of food for guinea pigs!

They love grazing grass, especially during the summer when the weather is warm. Dandelions are a welcome treat, as are plantain and clover.

Be careful not to overfeed your guinea pig.

Don't forget fresh water must be available at all times!

GUINEA PIG DAILY FOOD INTAKE

Getting into a good routine is vital, guineas like to know when they are getting fed each day. The thought of going hungry terrifies them! They are normally very food orientated and look forward to each meal and will 'weep weep' until they are fed! They need two feeds of vegetables daily, you will soon get to know what foods they favour and they will often choose to eat these things first! A double handful of roughly chopped vegetables between two guinea pigs twice daily is more than enough. This should be a mixture of green vegetables and herbs and something from the 'treats' section.

Example: (for two guinea pigs)

Breakfast-

- 2 cabbage leaves
- 2 cherry tomatoes
- small bunch of parsley

Dinner-

- 2 cabbage leaves
- 2 small chunks carrot
- small bunch of coriander

Nuggets should be fed once a day. One handful per guinea pig is more than enough. If a large number of nuggets are being left reduce the amount being fed until only a few are left over. Don't be tempted to fill the bowl to the top! Fresh hay should be available at all times, as there is no such thing as too much hay!



GUINEA PIG HOUSING

Guinea pigs can live both indoors and outdoors providing that they are kept in appropriate housing. They aren't very keen on the cold and most prefer to live indoors during the winter. Those who stay outside during the winter will need extra bedding and protection from the cold wind and rain. Regardless of whether they live indoors or outdoors all guinea pigs need access to an area for exercising. Daily cleaning out is vital as guinea pigs are quite messy. A build up of excrement will not only smell but it will also attract flies.

Indoor Housing

Indoor housing can be set up in a number of ways. Cages can be bought or built, it all depends on how much space you have and where you want to put it. You can build large, multi-level cages using what is known as the 'C&C' set up. These are mesh panels that are originally made for interchangeable shelving units. There are a number of websites and web forums that explain the use of 'C&C' cage set-ups. Indoor guinea cages can also be used, however they must be the correct size. [To house a Guinea Pig indoors, accommodation must be 120cm at least, in length. This is the minimum requirement set with guidance from the Animal Welfare Act NI \(2011\) and also the Rabbit Welfare Association and Fund.](#)

Bedding

Regardless of what type of housing you choose it is important to make sure your guinea pigs are as comfortable as possible. Choosing the right bedding is very important. At Assisi our guinea pigs enjoy a nice soft bed to sleep in, and a nice fleecy blanket lining the bottom of their accommodation. Fleece blankets are perfect for indoor guinea pigs. They are easily washed, cheap and they help to minimise smell.

Other options include finely shredded paper as it is very absorbent and is cheap. Hay is a must, a good big pile for them to pick through and sleep on if they prefer is always welcome!

Wood shavings are best avoided, they are dusty, cause respiratory and skin irritation and hold the smell.

