



# CHINCHILLA CARE

## BACKGROUND

**Average Size:** 12 inches

**Average Lifespan:** 15 – 20 years

- Very intelligent and curious
- Chinchilla fur is considered the softest in the world - thirty times softer than human hair
- Chinchillas can jump up to five feet above their head
- Chinchillas can sleep upside down. This is because they naturally sleep in small crevices or holes and can squeeze into the tiniest of spaces. They can also sleep upright or on their sides.

## COST

When you first get your chinchilla, you'll need to spend about \$150 for a good cage. Food, hay, bathing dust and bedding runs about \$200 a year and toys and treats generally run about \$180 annually.

## DIET

- Most chinchillas will eat about 1 – 2 tablespoons of pellets a day.
- Commercial chinchilla chow should be available to your pet at all times. It should be in pellet form and contain 16 - 20 percent protein, 2 - 5 percent fat and in the range 15 - 35 percent fiber. It's a good idea to avoid formulas that contain corn in the first few ingredients as it can be hard on your chinchilla's digestive track.
- Putting your chinchilla's food in a food hopper or a heavy ceramic dish can help keep the food from getting soiled or knocked over. Make sure to check the bowl daily for fecal pellets and urine and remember to throw away any food that has been contaminated.
- Even with pelleted food, chinchillas will need hay available to them at all times. Timothy hay is an excellent source of fiber and should make up the bulk of hay you feed your chinchilla. Alfalfa hay can also be added to the hay mixture in moderation as it is high in protein, calcium and oxalates.
- Your chinchilla's hay should be changed every day to keep it from becoming soiled or moldy. Hay should be available through a hay rack mounted on the side of your chinchilla's cage or made available on an upper shelf in your chinchilla's cage. It should never be placed on the ground.
  - You should never feed your chinchilla hay that is damp, smells musty or is discolored.
- Chinchillas have sensitive digestive systems and do best on a diet of pellets and hay only. Any treats should be given sparingly
- Raisins and dried fruit are favorite treats, but high in sugar so should be fed in very small quantities, and infrequently, you can make a raisin go a long way by cutting it into several small pieces.
  - Try not to feed more than 3 or 4 raisins per week.
- Chinchilla's should receive vitamin C supplementing as it helps prevent disease and tooth abscesses. You can give your pet vitamin C 3-4 times weekly – the dosage should be around 100 mg for each chinchilla. Different delivery methods for vitamin C are by water or children's chewable vitamin C (*with NO sugar*).
- Fresh, clean water should be available 24/7. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the cage is the best way to go. Using filtered water is highly recommended as

some of the minerals found in tap water can be harmful to their health.

- Check with your vet if you are unsure about anything you are feeding your chinchilla.

## HYGIENE AND BEHAVIOR

- Chinchillas are social animals and do best in same-sex pairs introduced early in life. They can be bonded with another chinchilla later in life, but it is a long process and never a guarantee they will be a good match. There is always the possibility of a falling out between any pair, so watch their interactions closely.
- Unlike most mammals, the chinchilla does not bathe in water. Instead, they take dust baths. Because of their extremely dense fur, chinchillas require regular dust baths to keep themselves clean. The dust bath is done in volcanic dust, common in their native homes in the Andes. This dust can usually be purchased at your local pet shop.
- To give your chinchilla a dust bath: place a deep bowl containing a small amount of the dust in your pet's cage 3 – 5 times a week. Then sit back and watch as your chinchilla rolls, flips, and plays in the dust! It is always best to remove the dusting container immediately after a bath to prevent the dust from being soiled with feces, food, or bedding.
  - *Chinchillas should never get wet. Because their fur is so dense, it does not air-dry, and moisture can be retained close to the skin. This has the potential to cause fungal and/or bacterial issues. If your chinchilla becomes wet, dry them immediately with a towel and a no-heat hair dryer.*
- Chinchillas are part of a group of rodents that produce cecotropes. Cecotropes are nutrient-rich and are passed out of the body like feces. They are then re-ingested by the chinchilla so the nutrients can be absorbed. Cecotropes have twice the protein and half of the fiber that typical feces have. This is an important part of the proper digestive function and nutrition of chinchillas, so don't worry if you see your chinchilla doing this.
- Chinchillas are crepuscular, meaning their peak activity periods are dawn and dusk. They tend to be active during the night as well. Late afternoon should be a great time for you and your pet to interact.
- Chinchillas have the type of teeth that grow continuously throughout their lives. These are called hypsodontal teeth. Hypsodont teeth have crowns (the part of the teeth you can see) that extend a great length beyond the gums, therefore hypsodontal teeth are unusually long when compared to the teeth of dogs, cats, or humans. The natural grinding action of chewing on toys, hay and other food items, generally causes the teeth to stay at an ideal length in normal herbivores. However, some chinchillas may need to have their teeth manually cut on a regular basis due to a number of health and genetic factors. They may also need to be manually cut if your chinchilla doesn't wear them down their self.



# CHINCHILLA CARE

## CAGE AND ENVIRONMENT

- The minimum size cage you should have for your chinchilla is 3 ft. wide, 2 ft. deep and 2 ft. tall. However it's always recommended to get the largest style you can afford. If you are going to keep more than one chinchilla in a cage there should be a minimum of 2 sq. feet of floor space per pet.
- Make sure the bottom of the cage has at least 2 inches of Carefresh bedding.
- A wire bottom cage should have plywood or a different type of covering over part of it so your chinchillas aren't always standing on wire.
- A chinchilla's cage should have multiple levels so that they can climb and jump around.
- You should provide a hut/cave or tunnel for your chinchilla to sleep and hide in.
- Keep the cage indoors, away from direct sunlight and drafts. Never allow the habitat temperature to rise above 80 degrees or below 50 degrees as this could seriously affect your chinchilla's health as they are very sensitive to temperatures.
- Check with your vet if you are unsure about anything you are giving your chinchilla.

## EXERCISE & TOYS

- If your chinchilla has been properly tamed and trained, she'll need at least a half an hour of exercise out of the cage in a safe, enclosed room every day. Scheduling a regular time when both of you are wide awake works best. If he's on a regular schedule for daily outing, his internal body clock should set itself for that time. Chin-proofing a room is necessary before letting a chinchilla run around. They can squeeze into very small spaces so make sure to check the room for ways that a chinchilla might get trapped, injured, or escape. A tiled surface, such as a bathroom, tends to be a good area for this. Be sure to stay in the room with the chinchilla as they will chew on woodwork, power cords or anything else they find.
- Some chinchillas love exercise wheels. The flying saucer model attaches to your chinchillas wall and provides plenty of room for them to run. Whatever you get make sure that the running surface is flat and solid so their nails and toes don't get caught.
- Tunnels can provide endless entertainment for your chinchilla. Some styles can even be hung from the ceiling /walls of your chinchilla's cage.

- A fleece hammock or tube can provide a cozy place for your chinchilla to hide and sleep.
- Though we don't normally think of twigs and branches as anything special, your chinchilla will likely view them as a terrific treat. Some twigs that are safe for you to give to your chinchilla can come from apple trees, pear trees and grape vines. Before you give your chinchilla any twigs make sure it has not been treated with pesticides. If you decide to branch out and get your chinchilla any other type of wood make sure to do your research as some types can be toxic for them.

## DAILY CARE

- Clean and refill water bottle
- Check food bowl for feces/urine and wash and refill
- Provide fresh hay for your chinchilla daily
- Clean cage completely once a week by replacing dirty bedding and scrubbing down the cage with a mixture of warm water and vinegar.

## SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Bring your chinchilla to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think your chinchilla is sick—seek help immediately. Common sign that something isn't right include watery eyes, nasal discharge or wheezing, pawing at mouth, constantly attending a particular body area, agitated behavior or complete disinterest, red and warm ears, drooling or wet chin/chest area and less/more food or water consumption.

# CHINCHILLA CARE

## Chinchilla Supply Checklist

- Well-constructed chinchilla cage, at least 3 ft. wide, 2 ft. deep and 2 ft. tall (make sure to include a few shelves at varying heights for your chinchilla to explore on)
- Carefresh bedding
- Chinchilla Chow - pellet form
- A small food hopper or heavy ceramic dish
- Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- Hay rack
- Timothy hay
- Dust bin and chinchilla dust for bathing
- At least 14" diameter flat and solid exercise wheel (No mesh or wire rungs!)
- Fleece tunnels/hammocks
- Sleeping hut/cave
- Chew proof toys
- Untreated wooden toys for chewing and wearing down a chinchilla's ever-growing teeth