

Caring for your chinchilla

How to keep pet chinchillas healthy and happy



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Are chinchillas right for me?

Chinchillas are alert, inquisitive and active little animals that make great pets for older children and adults. Children should always be supervised when handling chinchillas.

With plenty of care and attention they can be tamed and will live around 15 years.

Chinchillas are timid by nature and need to be handled with great care. Chinchillas prefer exploring on their own rather than being handled and for some, handling can be a bit stressful.

Chinchillas are nocturnal which means they sleep during the day and are active in the evening. If keeping just one chinchilla you will need to set aside time every day to give him attention, otherwise, busy owners might consider keeping two to ensure they have company.

Chinchillas can be quite vocal, hooting and squeaking to attract attention.

Choosing a new pet chinchilla

When selecting your chinchilla, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Active and alert to his surroundings
- Healthy skin and fur
- Clear nose
- Bright, clear eyes

- Clean ears
- Healthy appetite
- Neat teeth in alignment and a healthy orange colour
- Clean bottom

The first few days

It is important that your chinchilla suffers minimal stress when being introduced to their new home. Their cage should already be set up with bedding, hiding places, water and food, ready for their arrival.

When you first bring your new chinchilla home, he will be quite stressed by the transition so gently place him in his cage and then leave him alone for 48 hours.

Your chinchilla needs this time to get used to his new environment, which can take a couple of weeks or more.

You can help him acclimatise by spending time near his cage so he can get used to your scent, sound and habits. With time he will understand that you are not a threat.

Only attempt to handle him when you are confident he is comfortable with your presence.

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Creating a happy home

Chinchillas like to be kept in cool, dry conditions away from direct sunlight. The best cages for chinchillas are made completely of wire to prevent them from gnawing holes or soiling their delicate fur.

One or two wooden platforms half way up provide a warm place for your chinchilla to sit and also act as a landing pad when they leap around.

Their cage should be equipped with an interesting playground of pipes and tubes. Fruit tree or willow branches should be available for them to gnaw.

A nest box will give your chinchilla the refuge and sleeping area they need during the day.

Chinchillas love to bathe in sand so a large stainless steel dish containing specific chinchilla sand should always be available to allow him to keep his fur in tip-top condition.

Underneath most chinchilla cages is a solid galvanised tray which can be filled with a 5cm layer of wood pellet litter. This can be easily removed for cleaning.



A healthy diet and treats

Chinchillas come from the Andes in South America where the ground is sandy and the growing period is very short. They have developed a long intestinal tract which can cope with a nutrient-poor diet, therefore a rich diet can cause digestive problems. Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

A healthy, varied diet would be:

- Chinchilla pellets form a sufficient basic diet. They are made from a combination of vitamins, minerals, soybean oil, alfalfa meal, wheatgerm, molasses, oats and corn which provide a highly nutritional diet for chinchillas.
- Dry, fresh hay provides an excellent source of roughage.
- Fruit and vegetables can be offered sparingly as too much can upset their delicate digestion, for example carrots, kale, dandelion greens, strawberries, pears, bananas and apples.
- A mineral or pumice stone should be available at all times to let your chinchilla wear his teeth down and keep them healthy.

Treat them now and then with small pieces of wholemeal bread, raisins and other dried fruits.

Getting to know you

When approaching your chinchilla, speak softly to him so he becomes accustomed to your voice.

Gently allow him to become used to your hand, always use both hands to lift your chinchilla with one hand under their bottom to support their weight and the other hand around the chinchilla's back.

Hold your chinchilla close to your body or sit down and put them on your lap so they feel secure.

A chinchilla should never be picked up by his ears or tail.

Chinchillas can shed their fur if they become stressed, so patience is needed to allow your pet to get used to being handled.

Exercise your chinchilla needs

Although chinchillas sleep all day, they are very active in early evening and throughout the night.

Chinchillas can be allowed out of their cages for extra exercise around the home but must always be supervised carefully as their sharp teeth can cause damage and their inquisitive nature may cause them to eat something that is bad for them.

Chinchillas and other pets

Chinchillas can be kept alone if they receive plenty of attention from their owner. However, if you do not have much time, they should be kept in pairs.

Males are generally easier to tame. Females can spray urine when they are young if they are not handled properly.

Chinchilla gender

Please ask a member of our team to confirm the sex of your chinchilla before buying.

Potential health issues with chinchillas

Naturally chinchillas are very disease resistant but sometimes they can suffer from:

Fur biting

This can happen when too many young animals are housed together. Try isolating young chinchillas to allow their fur to grow back. Other causes are unsuitable diet or stress caused by environmental disturbance.

Constipation

You will notice that droppings are smaller. This is usually caused by overfeeding, a change of diet or an unsuitable diet. Try changing their pellets but consult your vet if this persists.

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Overgrown teeth

Your chinchilla's teeth are very important to their health and should be checked regularly to ensure they are not overgrown. It can be hard to tell just by looking so if you are unsure, offer your chinchilla some of their favourite food and if they seem unable to eat it then take him to a vet to be examined.

Pet insurance for your chinchilla

Chinchillas can be insured under plans for small mammals, however, it may not be possible to find an insurance plan specifically tailored to chinchillas.

Your new pet checklist

- ☐ Large wire cage with nest box
- ☐ Wood gnaws or fruit tree branch
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Food bowl
- ☐ Mineral lickstone
- ☐ Hay
- ☐ Wood pellets
- ☐ Vitamin drops
- ☐ Chinchilla pellets
- ☐ Cage disinfectant
- ☐ Cardboard tunnels
- ☐ Chinchilla sand with indestructible container



Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.



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