



AVIAN AND EXOTIC ANIMAL CARE + Veterinary Hospital

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Chinchillas

Faster than a speeding bullet! Able to leap furniture in a single bound! Bounces from one surface to another effortlessly! That's right – it's a chinchilla! These adorable little creatures can make delightful pets for the right owner. Chinchillas have delicate skeletons and love to chew on things like electrical cords, so a safe environment is essential. Keep your chinchilla's health on the right track with a healthy diet, lots of safe exercise, and regular veterinary care.

Biological Facts

- Long-tailed chinchilla: *Chinchilla lanigera*
- Native to the Andes mountain ranges of Northern Chile—live in rock crevices and holes on relatively barren slopes
- Life span: 10–15 years average
- Adult weight: 14 to 28 oz (400 to 800 gm) (females larger than males)
- Very delicate bone structure—not an ideal pet for small children
- Sexual maturity: 7 to 10 months
- Gestation: 105 to 115 days

Behavior

- Primarily active at night, dawn, and early evening
- Fast, agile, active; good at climbing and jumping
- Females dominant and more aggressive than males
- Difficult to litter train
- Very clean, virtually odorless
- Highly social; should be housed in pairs or small groups whenever possible
- Rarely bite; enjoy being petted, but may resist cuddling

- Chew on everything (“Chinchilla-proof” all areas in the chinchilla’s environment to prevent injuries and escape).

Diet

- High in fiber, low in carbohydrate, and low in sugar to prevent dental disease and digestive problems
- No breads, cereals, or nuts
- Free-choice quality grass hay, such as timothy, brome, and Bermuda grass
- 1 to 2 tablespoons of commercial chinchilla pellets daily
- Small amounts of alfalfa or clover hay, dried fruit, and fresh vegetables as treats—feed treats sparingly to prevent obesity
- Gradual diet changes to prevent stomach upset
- Fresh water daily

Environment

- Large, multi-level cage, with shelves for perching, plenty of room to run around, and cage floor of welded mesh wire with smooth areas for resting the feet
 - Place the cage in a quiet location and maintain humidity levels of 40% or less and a temperature of 50°F to 75°F (10°C to 24°C); temperatures greater than 80°F can be fatal
- Nest box (one for each chinchilla) for sleeping and for shelter from aggressive cage mates
- Wooden cage furniture, chew sticks, and pumice stones for chewing to help keep teeth healthy
- Exercise wheel with a smooth running surface (to prevent injuries to legs/feet)

Preventive Care

- Complete physical examination every 6 to 12 months
 - Consult a veterinarian with experience treating exotic companion mammals if you have any questions or concerns about your chinchilla’s health
- Annual fecal examination for internal parasites
- Monthly examination of males for penile hair rings (see Common Medical Disorders)
- Regular, supervised exercise in a “chinchilla-proofed” enclosure to prevent obesity
- Dust bath for approximately 10 to 15 minutes *at least* 4 to 5 times weekly

Common Medical Disorders

- Dental disease/drooling/problems eating
- Eye irritation/conjunctivitis
- Fur/skin disorders: ringworm (fungus), fur chewing, loss of fur
- Gastrointestinal disorders (diarrhea, bloat, stasis)
- Hair ring accumulation/constricting injury to penis (males)
- Heat stress
- Respiratory infections
- Trauma

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