

CHINCHILLA CARE

Chinchillas are nocturnal rodents originating from South American Andes mountains. They were originally captured and bred for their fur and eventually became popular pets. They can be friendly docile pets, who are surprisingly agile and quick.

Longevity: Chinchillas can live between 10-15 years if looked after correctly.

Sociability: This species is social and should be kept in pairs or groups for companionship. Males must be neutered if kept with any females to prevent pregnancy.

Environment:

Chinchillas should be kept indoors, they are not suitable for living outside in the UK.

- Chinchillas are very active and destructive animals so should be housed in multi-level wire cages at least 2 x 2 x 1m, to allow natural jumping and climbing behaviour. Solid flooring is recommended to avoid injury to limbs.
- Access to exercise around the house is recommended but only if directly supervised
- Within the cage, nest boxes, branches and shelves should be provided.
- A dust bath should be offered daily to keep the fur in good condition.
- An exercise wheel may be offered but must be at least 38cm in diameter, small wheels will risk injuries to the spine
- Chinchillas will get heat stress (especially when temperatures reach over 26°C (78F) and ideally should be kept in a low humidity environment between 10-20°C (50-68F). A marble tile can be offered to provide a place for these animals to cool down during summer months.
- Ensure that your chinchillas remain in a secure cage should you live in a multi pet household to protect them from predator species such as cats and dogs.
- The enclosure should be cleaned out at least once a week.

Diet:

The most important part of a chinchilla's diet is **hay**. This provides them with the correct food to wear down their continually growing teeth and maintain good gut function. They should be provided with a ball of fresh hay daily which is the same size as they are, this should be topped more frequently if necessary. They may be also offered the following.

- Dried herbs and willow branches are also loved by chinchillas and can make up a small part of the diet

- Commercial pelleted foods are also available and can make up a small part of a chinchilla's diet (a teaspoon a day maximum). Muesli mixes should be avoided to prevent selective feeding.
- Clean water must be given daily, a water bottle is often preferred by these animals but a bowl can also be provided.
- Fruits nuts and seeds should not be fed as they are too high in fats and sugars and are not a natural food source.

Preventative healthcare:

To keep your pets happy and healthy we advise a yearly check up with your vet as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders.**

- Chinchillas do not require any vaccinations
- Preventive parasite treatment is not recommended or necessary.
- Sexual maturity occurs between 7 – 10 months of age. Male chinchillas may be castrated from 4 months of age in order to reduce fighting, or prevent reproduction
- Female chinchillas are not routinely spayed unless there is a concern about reproductive disease
- We recommend weighing your chinchillas on a weekly bases at home to monitor for any signs of weight loss. The average weights are 400 – 500g for a male and 450 – 700g for a female

Insurance:

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.

Common health complaints:

- Dental disease – This is the most common complaint seen in pet chinchillas, it can be prevented by ensuring that your chinchilla eats plenty of hay. Ensure that you do not overfeed other food types. Signs of this problem include: weight loss, drooling, pawing at the mouth, squinting eyes and selectively eating only pellets and vegetables or not eating at all.
- Heart disease – Chinchillas are prone to developing heart problems, a murmur may be picked up during a regular veterinary examination. Signs of heart problems include rapid breathing, pale gums and inability to exercise.
- Hyperthermia (heat stroke) – In the height of summer chinchillas are at risk of developing heat stroke, to prevent this, keep their environment under 25°C (77F). Signs of heat stroke include collapse, excessive salivation, staggering/uncoordinated walking, rapid breathing. Never immerse your chinchilla in water to treat this problem – seek urgent veterinary attention.
- Diarrhoea and/or bloat – Chinchillas have a delicate digestive system that requires fibre (hay) to maintain health. Diarrhoea or bloating may be seen due to poor hay consumption, diets containing fruit, times of stress, infection of the gastrointestinal system or during the use of oral antibiotics. Signs include not eating, visible diarrhoea, visibly bloated abdomen, lethargy and reluctance to move – prompt veterinary advice should be sought for this life threatening condition.

