

# Pet Care of a Guinea Pig



Guinea pigs are small, compact mammals with short legs and no tail. They originate from the grasslands of the Andes Mountains in South America and are an important food source in that region.

## Diet

Guinea pigs need a high fibre diet due to their unusual digestive system. They need good quality hay to enable their digestion to function properly and grass-based pellets high in Vitamin C. They lack a certain enzyme, which would help store Vitamin C, so need a daily intake of this vitamin.

Vitamin C is vital to ensure proper bone growth and to boost the immune system to enable defence against germs and illness.

Guinea pigs should have daily vegetables like broccoli and kale, and some fruits, but only in small amounts. They should not have citrus fruits or too many root vegetables like carrots. They can become very ill if they have large quantities of these foods.

## Environment

Guinea pigs need a large, spacious area like a hutch, where they can explore and have room to stand on their back legs when necessary.

They require a safe, warm, dry area where they are away from other pets and safe from predators.

The temperature must be no warmer than 26°C as they can suffer with heat stroke, and anything colder than 15°C can give them a chill.

Guinea pigs must be in a quiet area as they can get stressed with noise.



### Did You Know?

Guinea pigs' teeth continue to grow throughout their life so need to chew hay which wears their teeth down.



### Did You Know?

When guinea pigs are born, they are already furry, have their eyes open and can eat solid food straightaway! They still have their mother's milk for 3 weeks though.

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## Guinea Pig Behaviour

Guinea pigs require regular, interesting exercise. Tubes and pipes are great for exploration and although they are not equipped to dig, guinea pigs like to be able to hide in burrows and shelters.

They are prey animals so naturally nervous and easily scared. When this happens, they will freeze for seconds or sometimes minutes. They can see above and behind themselves so they can see a predator in good time to escape!

*Guinea pigs are naturally sociable creatures and thrive in pairs or small groups. They can become very distressed if alone and often respond well to human company too. They need handling from an early age to become used to people and children.*

## Dangers to Guinea Pigs

- Lawnmower clippings can cause problems for their digestive system so never be tempted to give them these as a treat.
- Nesting material which can separate into strands like cotton wool. The animals can get tangled up in these strands, or if they eat they can become very poorly.
- Other animals are a threat to the security and safety of a guinea pig. As it is a prey animal, potential predators need to be kept away.



### Did You Know?

Guinea pigs communicate through making different sounds. For example, when they are missing a companion, enjoying some attention or when they get excited.

# Questions

1. What is the purpose of the first paragraph? Give as much detail as you can.

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2. Guinea pigs need two very specific foodstuffs. What are they, and why are they so important to a guinea pig?

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3. Guinea pigs are not to be given citrus fruits. Name two such fruits.  
(Use a dictionary if necessary).

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4. Explain why guinea pigs need to be housed in a specific temperature.

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5. Which of the Did you know...? facts surprises you the most, and why?

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6. Why are guinea pigs easily scared?

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7. How do you think a predator might interpret a guinea pig 'freezing' when it senses danger?

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8. Look at the paragraph in italics. Summarise the main points in that paragraph.

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9. What part of a guinea pig would be affected if it was given mown grass to eat?

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10. Imagine you are writing a label describing a guinea pig in a pet shop. In one paragraph, give the most important information to tell a potential owner about guinea pigs.

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# Answers

1. What is the purpose of the first paragraph? Give as much detail as you can.

The first paragraph is an introduction to the text. It explains what the text is about, and gives some background information about guinea pigs, including what they look like.

2. Guinea pigs need two very specific foodstuffs. What are they, and why are they so important to a guinea pig?

Guinea pigs need hay because it is high in fibre. Guinea pigs need this to help their digestive system function properly. They also need grass-based pellets because these are a good source of Vitamin C. Guinea pigs need Vitamin C to make sure their bones grow properly and that their immune system works well to fight illness and germs.

3. Guinea pigs are not to be given citrus fruits. Name two such fruits.

(Use a dictionary if necessary).

Two fruits which a guinea pig cannot have because they are citrus fruits are: lemons, limes, grapefruits, satsuma, oranges, tangerines, nectarines. (Accept any two).

4. Explain why guinea pigs need to be housed in a specific temperature.

Guinea pigs need to be housed in a specific temperature because if they get too warm, over 26°C they can get heat stroke, and if they are too cold, below 15°C, they can get a chill.

5. Which of the Did you know...? facts surprises you the most, and why?

Pupil's own response.

6. Why are guinea pigs easily scared?

**Guinea pigs are easily scared because they are prey animals. This means they are nervous incase a predator comes along and eats them.**

7. How do you think a predator might interpret a guinea pig 'freezing' when it senses danger?

**I think a predator might think the guinea pig is dead, or not see it properly because it is so still.**

8. Look at the paragraph in italics. Summarise the main points in that paragraph.

**The main points in this paragraph are: guinea pigs need to live with other guinea pigs; guinea pigs get lonely on their own; guinea pigs need to be handled by people from an early age.**

9. What part of a guinea pig would be affected if it was given mown grass to eat?

**If a guinea pig was given mown grass to eat, it would affect its digestive system/ stomach.**

10. Imagine you are writing a label describing a guinea pig in a pet shop. In one paragraph, give the most important information to tell a potential owner about guinea pigs.

**Pupil's own response.**