



Brook-Falls
Veterinary Hospital
& Exotic Care Inc.



Chinchilla Care Quick Guide

Husbandry & Diet Information

Fast Facts about Chinchillas

- ❖ Lifespan: average 10-15 years
- ❖ They are very vocal and will use sounds like squeaking and barking to express their feelings!
- ❖ They are made for cold weather! They have a thick fur coat to keep them nice and warm. They originate from South America where they live in the Andes Mountains.
- ❖ Their teeth continuously grow throughout their lives.
- ❖ Don't wake them up early! They are most active during the early evening and nighttime. During the day they enjoy taking long naps.
- ❖ They are born with their eyes open, fully furred, and very active!

Enclosure

Chinchilla proofing:

Chinchillas LOVE to chew on anything and everything. Homes must be “chinchilla-proofed” to prevent ingestion of anything that isn't meant for them to chew on!

Cage/exercise area:

A large cage is ideal for chinchillas as they are very active and agile. They love to run, jump, and climb around their cage. The bottom of their cage should be soft so pressure sores are avoided. Soft towels, fleece, or newspaper can be used for bedding. This should be checked regularly for chewed areas and should be changed at least once weekly.

Toys/enrichment:

An exercise wheel with a smooth-running surface should be placed in the cage because of their high energy levels. Wheels made from metal bars should be avoided as they can cause leg/feet injuries if they get caught. Chew toys, such as wooden huts or chew sticks, should be placed in the cage. These toys promote chewing to help keep their constantly growing teeth healthy.

Chinchillas require a dust bath for normal grooming. This should be provided daily and removed after each use. The dust and dust boxes can be purchased at local pet stores.

Diet

The majority of a chinchilla's diet should be grass hay and it should be available 24/7. If your chinchilla is over 6 months old alfalfa hay should only be used as a treat because it is too rich in certain nutrients which may cause digestive problems or weight gain if given too often. In addition to hay, you can offer small amounts of chinchilla specific pellets. These pellets should be pellets only and you should avoid

any mixtures with nuts and seeds.. Chinchillas should be offered about 2 tablespoons of pellets daily. If the above diet is offered, there is no need for additional vitamins.

Water should be available in a sipper bottle that hangs from the side of the cage and a crock at all times. If you choose to use a sipper bottle, be sure to clean it regularly and check the spout to see if it is obstructed by small pieces of chewed food.

Vaccinations

No vaccinations are required for chinchillas. But annual wellness exams are recommended!

Chinchilla specific problems:

Fur slip: Chinchillas have the ability to release or “slip” patches of fur when handled roughly, stressed, or when fighting. No permanent damage is usually done and the fur usually re-grows in a few months.

Fur ring: Male chinchillas can develop a ring of fur around the base of their penis. Once a month this area should be checked and any fur or debris should be removed. The hair can cut off circulation to the penis and can cause a considerable amount of pain and swelling. Ask your veterinarian to show you how to check this area.

Common Diseases of Chinchillas:

Respiratory disease: Conditions such as overcrowding, poor ventilation, and high humidity may predispose chinchillas to respiratory disease. If left untreated this can quickly develop into pneumonia. Common signs include lack of appetite, lethargy, difficulty breathing, nasal discharge, and swollen lymph nodes.

Overgrown/diseased teeth: Like many rodents, overgrown teeth can be common in chinchillas. Their teeth grow continuously throughout their life. Signs of overgrown teeth can include decreased appetite and drooling. During your pet’s exam the veterinarian will look in their mouth with a mouth speculum to visualize both the incisors and the molars. If any of them are uneven, overgrown, or trapping the tongue, a teeth trim will be needed. Teeth trims are done under anesthesia and some animals may need them on a monthly basis. Sometimes teeth can become infected or diseased therefore sedated x-rays of the skull may be recommended before trims/extractions.

Diarrhea: Although diarrhea is not a disease, rather a sign of disease, it can tell us a lot about your pet’s health. Rodents have digestive systems which are designed to digest a large amount of fiber therefore they can easily develop diarrhea or loose stools due to changes in diet, incorrect usage of antibiotics, stress, and diets low in fiber or high in fat and protein. A diagnosis of the cause of diarrhea may be made after diagnostic testing such as microscopic fecal exam, radiographs to see the gastrointestinal system, and blood testing.

Heat stroke: Chinchillas are very susceptible to extreme heat due to their thick fur coat. Their environmental temperature should always be kept below 80°F. Be sure to keep an eye on humidity as well as this can lead to fatal heat stroke or respiratory disease. Heat stroke is a true emergency. Your veterinarian will have to cool down your pet using techniques that will not cause the chinchillas to chill or shiver. Hospitalization is required to monitor vital signs. Signs of heat stroke include panting, high body temperature, open mouth breathing, and reluctance to move.

Any deviation from normal should be a cause for concern and requires immediate evaluation by your veterinarian