



Degu

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

Degus (*Octodon degus*) are native to Chile, inhabiting the semi-arid scrub areas on the west slope of Central Andes. They are very social animals and should always be kept in pairs. Degus reach sexual maturity at 5 months and can live up to 10 years.

DIET

Pellet: ¼ cup daily. Unfortunately, there are no specially formulated pellets for degus. However, they are closely related to chinchillas and guinea pigs, and do well on a pellet diet that consists of a 50:50 mix of high quality chinchilla and guinea pig pellets. We recommend Oxbow brand Chinchilla and Guinea pig pellets. Do not feed seeds, nuts, or pellets formulated for rabbits!

Hay: Always provide Timothy hay. Alfalfa hay and orchard grass can be offered in small quantities.

Vegetables: Good choices include collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, chard, kale, parsley, bok choy. They enjoy cucumber (without the skin) broccoli heads, and carrot shavings. Avoid spinach in large quantities. Also avoid iceberg and romaine lettuce. Decrease the amount of leafy greens if it causes your chinchilla to have diarrhea.

Fruit: Occasional. They enjoy berries, grapes, bananas, and raisins. Be careful when feeding fruit. In large amounts, fruit can cause abdominal pain, gas, and diarrhea.

ENVIRONMENT

Chinchillas should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide.

Cage: Chinchillas are fantastic jumpers and enjoy multiple-level cages. Make sure to cover wire platforms with cardboard or towels. It is easy for chinchillas to get their toes or feet stuck between the wires, causing injury.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Don't use cedar or pine shavings. The oils can cause skin and respiratory irritation, and can also cause changes in liver function. Alder shavings are okay but not recommended.

Moisture: Provide a water bottle at all times, and change the water daily.

Furniture: Provide at least one hiding box. Chinchillas like to hide and play in ferret-sized tubing.

Dusting: Wild chinchillas clean their fur by rolling in dust. Domestic chinchillas need to be provided with dust as well. Chinchilla dust and chinchilla dusting containers can be obtained from most pet stores. Dust your chinchilla twice a week.

MEDICAL CARE

Exams: Bring chinchillas in once a year for an annual health check.

Common Illnesses:

Dental Disease: Symptoms include: change in appetite from hard foods to soft foods, decreased

appetite, smaller and/or soft stools, drooling, and runny eyes. Diagnosis requires a detailed oral exam often requiring anesthesia. Though not curable, it is treatable with regular tooth trims.

Facial Abscesses: Symptoms include: decreased appetite, lump on jaw-line or cheek area. This is related to dental disease and may require surgery.

Gastric Stasis: This can be caused by a reaction to pain; can also be caused by a change in diet or overfeeding fruit. Symptoms include: loss of appetite, no stool production, and rapid breathing. This condition can escalate very quickly, so chinchillas exhibiting any of these behaviors should be taken to a veterinarian right away.

Bring your chinchilla to a veterinarian right away if it is exhibiting any of the following symptoms:

Loss of appetite

Diarrhea or soft stool

No stool production

Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing

Extreme lethargy