



CHINCHILLA

Diet and Care Recommendations

GENERAL INFORMATION

Chinchillas (*Chinchilla lanigera*) are native to Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. They inhabit the cool, semiarid, rocky slopes of the Andes Mountains at elevations of 10,000 to 16,000 feet. Chinchillas reach sexual maturity at 8 months and can live up to 24 years. They should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move around, climb, and hide. Chinchillas can overheat very easily and must be kept cool.



DIET

Pellet: ¼ cup daily. Pellets must be specially formulated for chinchillas. We recommend Oxbow brand chinchilla pellets. DO NOT feed seeds and nuts! These are high in fat and low in nutrients, causing liver and kidney disease, skin problems, and a lowered immune system.

Hay: Provide access to Timothy hay at all times.

Vegetables: Good choices include collard greens, mustard greens, dandelion greens, chard, kale, parsley, and bok choy. 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: Can be offered occasionally. They enjoy berries, grapes, bananas, and raisins. Be careful when feeding fruit. In large amounts, fruit can cause abdominal pain, gas, and diarrhea.

ENVIRONMENT

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

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

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

Dusting: Wild chinchillas clean their fur by rolling in dust. Domestic chinchillas need to be provided with dust as well. Chinchilla dust and dusting containers can be obtained from most pet stores. Dust your chinchilla twice weekly. The fur will become matted if dust is not provided.

MEDICAL CARE

Bring chinchillas in once a year for an annual health check. Wellness exams are important to ensure the overall wellbeing of the pet, as well as to catch any problems or diseases early.

Common Illnesses:

- a) **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 usually not curable, it is treatable with regular tooth trims.
- b) **Facial abscesses:** Symptoms include: decreased appetite, lump on jawline or cheek area. This is related to dental disease and may require surgery.
- c) **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 these symptoms should be taken to a veterinarian right away.

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

**Loss of appetite
Diarrhea or soft stool
No stool production
Rapid or difficulty breathing
Extreme lethargy**