



Chinchilla Handling

How to safely handle your pet chinchilla

Chinchillas are delicate pets, and improper handling can result in injury to both them and their owners. Once you have the basics down (housing, diet, water, treats, etc.), and your chinchilla is feeling comfortable in their new enclosure, knowing how to safely interact with your new pet is the next step in building a bond with your chinchilla.

Because they are prey animals, chinchillas should always be allowed to set their own pace when interacting with humans. They should have plenty of space to choose to interact on their own terms, and should have an escape route back to their enclosure or hide to avoid feelings of being trapped. Creating a chinchilla-proof play area near the opening to their enclosure that is large enough for them to move around in, and for you to sit in, is a great first step.

Allow multiple times for your chinchilla to experience the outside of cage play area with supervision, but without your direct interaction, for them to gain confidence. Once they are comfortable with the new experience, you may sit calmly on the floor in the area, and allow your chinchilla to explore around you. Next, you may bring some of their favorite treats into the area with you, and allow them to approach you to gain the reward of the treats. Once they are comfortable taking treats from your hand and are eating next to you without going back to a different area to eat, you may try some gentle petting on their head and back while they are enjoying their snacks.

After your chinchilla is comfortable with your touch and is readily approaching you to interact, you may consider picking them up. Chinchillas require very gentle handling with firm support of both their chest and hind end if picked up. Hold them close to your body, so they feel secure, and do not apply excessive pressure around their ribcage. If your chinchilla is becoming stressed by this type of interaction, they may “bark” at you, at which point you should allow them to return to their preferred activities. Give them plenty of breaks and continue to reward positive interactions with their favorite treats.

Important “do **NOTS**” when picking up and holding your chinchilla:

Do **NOT** attempt to scruff your chinchilla to hold them. Chinchillas can slip their fur – this means that if their skin is grabbed harshly (think, like a predator), that area of skin can come off to allow the chinchilla to get away.

Do **NOT** hold them by their tail – chinchillas can also fur slip on their tail, resulting in a degloving injury affecting the length of the tail.

Do **NOT** hold your chinchilla too tightly. They have very delicate skeletal structures, so holding around the chest too tightly could potentially impair their breathing ability or even result in fractured ribs.