



# Basic Chinchilla Care Sheet

## **Characteristics**

Chinchillas are in the rodent family and come from the Andes Mountains in Chile. They live an average of 10-15 years in captivity and weigh between 400-800 grams as adults.

Not known to be an ideal pet for small children, care should be taken when adopting this small herbivore.

## **Behavior**

Chinchillas are fast, agile, and great jumpers and climbers. Mostly active at night, they can adjust their schedule to be more active at dawn and dusk to interact with families. As highly social critters, they should be housed in pairs or small groups whenever possible. They should be bonded as kits or young adults. Pair bonding established adults can often be very difficult. Consult with a veterinarian before attempting this. They are very clean, virtually odorless animals that can be litter trained. They can be destructive though, and will chew on anything. “Chinchilla-proof” all areas in the chinchilla’s environment to prevent injuries and escape.

## **Diet**

Chinchillas should be offered high fiber, low carb and low sugar diets to help prevent dental and digestive problems. This means no breads, cereals or nuts. They should be offered a quality grass hay at all times; like timothy, orchard grass, Bermuda grass and more. Alfalfa hay, clover hay, dried fruit, and fresh fruits and veggies should be offered in very small quantities as treats to prevent obesity. Feed no more than 1-2Tbsp of commercial chinchilla pellets per day.

If attempting to change their diet, a gradual diet change over days to weeks will help ease GI upset.

Free choice water should be offered in a dripper bottle and/or a ceramic dish.

## **Environment**

A large, multi-level cage, with shelves for perching, plenty of room to run around, and cage floor that is smooth and solid is needed for chinchillas. No rough or wire floorings should be used. There is a high risk of getting their feet caught between wires. They should have an exercise wheel with a smooth-running surface. Chinchillas prefer a place in a quiet location, low humidity, and a temperature of 50°F to 75°F (10°C to 24°C); temperatures greater than 80°F can be fatal. Wooden cage furniture, chew sticks, and pumice stones should be offered for chewing to help keep their teeth healthy. Provide at least one hide per chinchilla if they are housed together.

## **Preventive Care**

Just like more traditional pets, chinchillas should have routine exams every 6-12 months. Consult a veterinarian with experience treating exotic companion mammals if you have any questions or concerns about your chinchilla's health, but a physical exam should be done every 6-12 months. Monthly examination of males for penile hair rings (see Common Medical Disorders) can be done at home. Regular, supervised exercise in a "chinchilla-proofed" enclosure to prevent obesity. Dust bath for approximately 10 to 15 minutes *at least* 4 to 5 times weekly

## **Common Medical Disorders**

- Dental disease/drooling/problems eating
- Eye irritation/conjunctivitis
- Fur/skin disorders: ringworm (fungus), fur chewing, loss of fur
- Gastrointestinal disorders (diarrhea, bloat, stasis)
- Hair ring accumulation/constricting injury to penis (males)
- Heat stress
- Respiratory infections
- Trauma