

Caring for Your Guinea Pig

Compatibility: It is a myth that two male guinea pigs will always fight. How well two cavies get along depends on their personalities rather than their gender. The vast majority will be delighted to have a cage companion. The easiest match is usually between two babies or a baby and an adult, but adults can be paired up successfully as well. Introduce cavies in a neutral, open area. Watch carefully for an hour or so. If they are getting along, they can be moved to a freshly cleaned cage (the larger, the better, as it will improve the odds of making a successful pairing). Monitor them for another hour or so, making sure they continue to get along. Immediately separate fighting guinea pigs with a towel to avoid being bitten.

Quarantine: Quarantine a new cavy for two to three weeks in a separate room to ensure he's healthy and to make sure nothing gets passed on to your other cavies.

RAISING A HEALTHY CAVY

To ensure your cavy will live a long, healthy life, find a cavy-knowledgeable vet (exotics veterinarian) to provide veterinary care. A wellness check will familiarize the vet with your pet and give you a chance to ask questions. The vet can check for parasites, show you how to trim the nails, make sure that the teeth are in good shape and that the cavy is in good health. The best way to monitor your cavy's health is to weigh him or her once a week using a kitchen scale. Keep a chart! Often, the first sign of illness is weight loss. A chart will alert you to any gradual weight loss, giving you an opportunity to get medical help early when many illnesses are most effectively treated.

Things to Watch for: If your cavy shows any of these signs, see a vet immediately: refusal to eat or drink, lethargy, labored breathing, wheezing; sneezing; crusty eyes; dull and/or receding eyes; rough or puffed up coat, hunched posture, diarrhea, blood in urine, limping, loss of balance, head tilt, excessive scratching or hair loss. Be observant. Unusual behavior (like sitting with his or her face in a corner and being slow to respond to you) could also be reason for alarm. An ill cavy can go downhill very quickly. Prompt, competent veterinary care can be crucial to saving the life of an ill cavy. By the time a cavy shows signs of illness, it is often seriously ill. For this reason, an adult needs to be involved in the daily care of any guinea pig. Most bacterial infections can be cured in the early stages with a course of cavy-safe antibiotics. Don't be afraid to call your vet if you have any concerns.

WARNING: Penicillin-based drugs (like amoxicillin) are deadly to cavies. Make sure your vet does not prescribe these drugs. If you are not sure whether the prescribed drugs are safe, ask. Because Baytril (an otherwise excellent broad-spectrum antibiotic) can interfere with growth, it should be given to baby cavies only as a last resort. Find more information on care and medical issues at: www.guinealynx.info

RECOMMENDED READING

A good book on cavy care will help to answer questions about your pet. Visit your local library to see what they have to offer, but keep in mind that even new books can include outdated or inappropriate advice. Do some research and get online for the most current information and check guinealynx.info/reviews.html for more ideas. Your new cavy will be a fascinating and wonderful pet. We are happy to share our lives with our own cavies and wouldn't have it any other way!

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For more information, please visit cavyspirit.com.