

Caring for Your Pet Chinchilla

Caging and Bedding

- Chinchilla cages should have a flat bottom (no wire) to prevent foot injuries and should be large enough for the chinchilla to run and hop in any direction. Height is important since chinchillas are excellent jumpers, and they often do well in multi-level cages.
- A hide-box or igloo should be available for hiding. Bedding should be unscented, dye-free paper bedding. Avoid terry cloth towels, carpet, or wood chips.

Food and Water

- 80-90% of a chinchilla's diet should be high quality grass hay, such as timothy hay or orchard grass hay. Your chinchilla should always have hay available.
- Pellets should be plain, hay-based pellets, with no seeds, nuts, or dried fruit. Pellets should be measured, and most adult chinchillas should get about 1-2 tablespoons per chinchilla per day.
- Small amounts of fresh produce can be given daily (see recommended greens below). Avoid treats that are high in sugar, especially commercial treats (e.g. yogurt drops). Fruits are okay in very small amounts.
- Fresh water should always be available in a bottle and changed daily.
- *Learn more about the recommended diet and greens below*

Activity and Enrichment

- Chinchillas enjoy playing with and chewing on toys, but it is important that they are made out of safe materials. Cardboard boxes, such as empty cereal and granola bar boxes make great toys (especially if you stuff them with hay!). Commercially available toys made from timothy hay are excellent as well.
- Your chinchilla may also enjoy natural wood blocks or branches to chew on. Be sure to obtain them from a source that doesn't use pesticides.
- Some chinchillas enjoy using exercise wheels. If you get an exercise wheel for your chinchilla, make sure that it has a solid (not wire) floor that won't catch his/her toes.
- If your chinchilla spends time outside of the cage, he/she should always be supervised and should not have access to electrical cords or other dangerous household items.
- Chinchillas require a dust bath made from volcanic ash, which can be purchased at pet stores. Over-use of the dust bath can lead to eye and upper respiratory problems for your chinchilla, so we recommend only allowing access to the dust bath for 15-20 minutes once or twice a week.

Veterinary Care

- Young chinchillas should have yearly veterinary exams to evaluate their overall health and well-being. Older chinchillas or chinchillas with known health problems may need to be seen more frequently.
- You may wish to have your male chinchilla neutered to decrease behavioral problems and allow him to live with a female.
- Some chinchillas require regular dental care, as their teeth grow continuously throughout life. Your veterinarian should always evaluate your chinchillas' dental health at your visit.
- Signs that your chinchilla is sick include decreased appetite, decreased fecal output, small fecal balls, lethargy, sneezing or nasal discharge, excessive salivation, sores on the feet, or abnormal urination. Chinchillas are good at hiding signs of illness until they are very sick, so please contact your veterinarian right away if you have any indication that your chinchilla is not feeling well. Not eating for more than 12 hours is always an emergency!

Chinchilla Diet

Chinchillas are herbivores, meaning they eat only plant material. Herbivores must have food moving constantly through their digestive system to avoid health problems. They require a high fiber, low carbohydrate, and low fat diet. This is accomplished by feeding your chinchilla a diet that consists of high-fiber grass hay, a fortified pellet diet, and fresh produce.

Our recommendations for a balanced chinchilla diet are:

Hay

Your chinchilla should always have fresh grass hay available and hay should make up 75-80% of his/her diet. The most common grass hays available in pet stores are timothy and orchard grass. Alfalfa hay contains too much calcium and protein for an adult animal and should only be fed to young chinchillas (<6 months) and lactating females.

Pellets

Choose a pelleted diet that is hay-based and does not contain any added fruits, nuts, or seeds. Most adult chinchillas do well with 1-2 tbsp/day, but your veterinarian may recommend increasing or decreasing the amount, depending on your chinchilla's weight. We recommend feeding your chinchilla a measured amount of pellets every day so that you will notice as soon as possible if your chinchilla's appetite has decreased.

Fresh Produce

About 10% of your chinchilla's diet should consist of leafy greens and herbs (see provided greens list for ideas). Your chinchilla can also have other vegetables in small amounts. Fruits and high-sugar vegetables (e.g. carrots, corn), should only be offered as treats in very small quantities (<1 tsp/day).

Treats & Supplements

The chinchilla gastrointestinal system is not designed to handle foods that are high in fat or sugar. We do not recommend feeding yogurt drops or other commercial chinchilla treats that are high in sugar. Breads and cereals should also be avoided. Fruits and nuts are okay as occasional treats, but only in very small quantities. Salt blocks or other mineral supplements are not necessary.

Water

Chinchillas should have access to water at all times, either in a water bottle or a heavy flat-bottomed bowl. Water should be changed daily.

Greens

Greens are a very important part of your pet chinchilla's diet. They provide important nutrients, increase water intake, and help provide interesting variety in your pet's diet. We generally recommend feeding about ½ cup of greens per two pounds bodyweight daily. If your pet is not accustomed to eating greens, you should introduce them slowly to prevent diarrhea.

Recently, there has been a lot of interest in the role that the mineral content of greens plays in the development of urinary tract disease in small mammals. The focus has been primarily on calcium and oxalates, since these are the common components of urinary stones in small mammals. In general, we recommend feeding greens that are lower in calcium and oxalates as the basis of your pet's salad and rotating through the higher calcium/oxalate greens in smaller quantities, unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian. The calcium and oxalate contents of common greens are listed below. If your pet has a history of urinary problems, consider misting the greens with water before serving to increase water intake.

Vegetable	Calcium ¹	Oxalate ²
Arugula	Low	Low
Basil	Low	Moderate
Beet Greens	Low	High
Bibb/Boston Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Bok Choy	Moderate	Low
Cilantro	Very low	Very low
Collards	Moderate	Low
Curly Endive	Low	Medium
Dandelion Greens	Very high	High
Dill	Very low	Low
Green Leaf Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Kale	Moderate	Moderate
Mustard Greens	Moderate	Low
Mustard Spinach	Extremely high	Very high
Parsley	High	Moderate
Radicchio	Very low	Low
Red Leaf Lettuce	Very low	Very low
Romaine	Very low	Very low
Spinach	Low	Very high
Swiss Chard	Very low	Very high
Turnip Greens	Very high	Low
Watercress	Low	Low

¹ Compiled from nutritiondata.com

² Compiled from lowoxalateinfo.com

