

# Chinchilla Care Guide

*Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital*

## HOUSING

### Cages:

- Avoid wire bottom cages as these can cause injuries as feet can get caught in the wire mesh
- Avoid aquariums or plastic containers as they don't allow for good ventilation.
- Chinchillas are very active and multi-level cages can allow them to jump and climb.
- Try to find a cage with a removable bottom pan to make cleaning easy
- Provide branches and climbing areas to allow your chinchilla to exercise and move about the cage
- Provide nest boxes within the cage
- Ensure the cage is in a cool, dry location with good ventilation as chinchillas do not do well with high humidity or high heat.



### Bedding:

- Always use unscented bedding and avoid cedar and pine shavings – strongly smelling bedding can cause irritation to the nose and lungs and contribute to respiratory disease.
- CareFresh or recycled newspaper beddings (eg Yesterday's News) are recommended as they are good absorbable unscented materials.
- Ensure to clean the bedding regularly – spot clean daily and change all the bedding 1-2 times a week.

### Dust Baths:

- Chinchillas require dust baths to keep their fur in good condition, removing oil and dirt from the fur.
- Provide commercial chinchilla dust for 15-20mins daily or several times a week. Excessive use may lead to eye problems so don't leave the dust bath in the cage at all times.

## NUTRITION

- Always ensure fresh water is available, most chinchillas will learn to drink from a water bottle.

### Hay

- 75-80% of the diet should be good quality hay as this helps regulate their digestive system and helps prevent dental diseases.
- Ensure hay is always readily available.
- Timothy hay is recommended however other alternatives include orchard grass and oat hays if your chinchilla won't eat timothy hay.
- Always ensure your hay is fresh and free from mold.

### Pellets

- Chinchilla pellets provide a balance of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients.
- Avoid pellets that are sold as "mixes" containing seeds, fruits or nuts – your chinchilla will pick out their favorite food and often not obtain the balanced diet they need. They can also be too high in fats leading to excessive weight gain
- Use a timothy hay based pellet
- Feed 1-2 tablespoons of pellets per day for an adult chinchilla.

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*Caring for all of your pets*

## Treats

- Fresh vegetables can be used as treats and should make up less than 10% of the daily diet
- Introduce new vegetables slowly and one at a time to your chinchilla to prevent diarrhea.
- Dried and fresh fruits can also be given in small amounts

## BEHAVIOR

- Chinchillas may fight if housed together
- Occasionally they can be kept successfully in pairs, single sex groups or one male with several females but be sure to monitor closely for signs of fighting
- If opposite sexes are housed together we would recommend castrating the males to prevent unwanted breeding.

## HEALTH CARE

- Chinchillas by nature hide symptoms and signs of illnesses making early detection of disease difficult
- New patient exams and yearly examinations are therefore strongly recommended to help your chinchilla live a long and happy life
- If you notice any changes to your chinchilla's behavior, appetite or bowel movements we would recommend contacting your veterinarian immediately