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After Hours **Emergency Paging System**

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Guinea Pig Care and Facts

Stats:

- Native to the Andes Mountains of South America
- Guinea pigs are social animals and rarely bite.
- Lifespan is 5-6 years.
- Guinea pig teeth grow continuously. The process of chewing hay shortens the teeth.
- Males reach sexual maturity at 3 months of age and females at 2 months. The gestation period is 59-72 days. Babies are born with a full coat and open eyes.
- Males weigh between 900-1200 grams, females between 700-900 grams.

Housing:

- The bigger the better. The cage should be large enough to accommodate feeding supplies, hide boxes, toys, and allow plenty of room to move around. Guinea pig urine is high in ammonia, which is irritating to the lungs, so they need to be able to move away from where they urinate.
- Use solid bottom cages with wire sides for ventilation. Cover the cage bottom with several inches of Carefresh (crumbled soft paper).
- Temperature needs to be within the range of 65-79° F.
- Thoroughly clean the cage and change the substrate 2-3 times weekly.
- Aromatic cedar and pine shavings are not recommended. They contain resins that may be irritating to the skin and lungs.
- Never put a cage in direct sunlight or drafty area.
- For playtime, fill a toddler pool with Oxbow oat hay and let them play. Cavies are natural burrowers that will wheek and whistle in their exciting new habitat.
- Do not house intact males together, as they often fight and compete for resources.

Diet:

- Feed an unlimited amount of Timothy hay.
- Pellets are not part of a guinea pig's natural diet. They do not provide the long-stem fiber needed for intestinal health or tooth maintenance and can lead to obesity. If you choose to feed pellets, use Timothy based pellets and limit to ¼ cup per day.

- Guinea pigs are unique in that they require Vitamin C daily in their diet. Give your guinea pig 20-50 mg of vitamin C daily. You can use Oxbow or OTC children's chewable vitamin C tablets. There are vitamin C drops that can be added to the water, but these inactivate quickly and your guinea pig may refuse the water.
- Supplement the diet daily with veggies high in vitamin C, such as bell peppers, tomatoes, kiwi, and oranges. Stay away from veggies and greens high in calcium or oxalates.
- It is not recommended to feed alfalfa hay or pellets to your guinea pig. Alfalfa is high in fat and calcium, which can predispose your guinea pig to certain diseases.
- Offer fresh, clean water daily in a water bottle with a sipper tube. Approximate daily water consumption is 100-150 mL (3-5 oz) of water a day.
- Sweet treats, fruit, and seeds are unhealthy and can lead to digestive problems and obesity, even when given in small amounts.

Common Medical Problems:

- Obesity - Prevent with proper diet and exercise.
- Dental disease (infection, overgrown teeth, sharp points on teeth) - Causes include improper diet, genetics, low vitamin C, and trauma. Signs of dental disease include decreased appetite, drooling, or grinding teeth. Preventative measures are proper hay diet and vitamin C supplementation.
- Abscesses - Injuries from housing structures and cage mates can cause an abscess. These usually appear as circular lumps on the skin. These need to be surgically lanced.
- Gastrointestinal stasis (decreased motility of stomach and intestinal contents through system) - Signs include decreased appetite, decreased fecal production, hunched posture, distended abdomen, and lethargy. Prompt medical attention is required.
- Diarrhea - Causes include bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections. Diarrhea can lead to dehydration, weight loss, and electrolyte imbalances.
- Heat Stroke - Guinea pigs are extremely susceptible to heat strokes. Signs include being in a hot environment, salivating, shallow breathing, and lethargy.
- Bladder stones - Stones in the bladder can cause infection and inflammation in the bladder, leading to pain. They can also lodge in the urethra and obstruct the ability to urinate. Inability to urinate is an emergency situation. Signs include difficulty urinating, painful urination, change in urine color, decreased appetite, and lethargy. Preventative measures include feeding a proper diet, avoiding food high in calcium or oxalates, and proper water intake.
- Ovarian cysts - Signs are not always immediately present. Signs can include any of the following: hair loss, distended abdomen, lethargy, hunched posture, and decreased appetite. Prevent by spaying all females.
- Mites - The most common skin disease, mite infestation may manifest with severe itchy skin (which can look like a seizure), crusts, and red skin.
- If breeding is planned, make sure to breed the female by 6 months of age to prevent the need of a C-section. In females that have not given birth at least once, the pelvic canal

will decrease in size at 6 months of age, closing down to a size too small for a baby to pass through.

- Physical examinations are recommended every 12 months. It is recommended to spay or neuter every guinea pig.