



CARING FOR YOUR CHINCHILLA

ABOUT CHINCHILLAS

Chinchillas are native to the Andes where they live in groups at higher elevations. Adult chinchillas are about 12-20 inches long (including the tail) and weigh between one to two pounds. Chinchillas are long-lived animals: your pet may provide companionship for 10-20 years.

Chinchilla fur is one of the softest of all animals, with 60 hairs per follicle. When grasped too tightly, or their fur is caught in something, this thick fur will slip off in patches as the chinchilla tries to escape.

Naturally living in large groups, chinchillas are social animals. A solitary chinchilla will require a lot of attention, and you may want to have two or more of the same gender.

Since chinchillas are crepuscular—meaning they are more active at dawn and dusk—don't be worried if you see them sleeping during the day.

HANDLING

Take time for your pet to get comfortable with its new home. Spend time near its enclosure, speaking to it and gradually offering treats as your chinchilla moves toward you. Soon you can offer a treat on your palm and entice your pet to crawl onto your hand. Slowly your chinchilla will become comfortable climbing on your arms, and you will be able to gently pick it up and handle it.

HABITAT

Chinchillas are active animals that can jump as high as five feet, so choose a spacious enclosure that is at least 24" tall and 24" deep. A multi-level enclosure provides more opportunities for your pet to jump and climb. The habitat should have solid floors and tunnels or nest boxes where your pet can hide.

Provide a variety of chew toys to keep your pet stimulated and to keep their constantly growing teeth worn down.

Chinchillas are adapted to a cool, dry climate so keep the enclosure out of direct sunlight and away from drafts. The temperature in your pet's enclosure should not exceed 80 degrees Fahrenheit, but lower is preferable.

Chinchillas release excess heat through their ears, so if your chinchilla is getting too hot, you may notice the skin in its ears becoming red, with visible red veins.

Paper or hardwood shavings are good bedding substrates. Avoid corncob and cedar shavings. Any soiled bedding should be removed daily, and completely change all bedding weekly.

Food bowls or hay racks are an important part of your chinchilla's habitat. A removable dust bin will allow your pet to clean its fur.

Thoroughly clean your pet's habitat (including bowls, toys, hiding places) monthly with hot soapy water.

Completely disinfect the habitat by adding two to three drops of bleach to one gallon of water, then immerse or wipe the cage, dishes, and toys with the solution. Thoroughly rinse all items with hot water to remove all traces of bleach. Make sure no bleach smell remains before placing your chinchilla back into its home. Never use food preparation areas to clean small animal habitats or anything in their habitats. If you clean the habitat in the bathroom, disinfect the area completely afterwards.

GROOMING/CLEANING

Chinchillas are naturally clean animals with very little odor. In their naturally dry environment, they clean themselves by taking dust baths a few times a week to absorb oil and dirt. Because of the density of chinchilla fur, do not bathe your chinchilla in water. It can be very difficult for the fur to dry, which can lead to bacterial or fungal infection. Allow your pet chinchilla to dust-bathe only in store-bought chinchilla dust.

WATER AND FOOD

Chinchillas are rather active small pets and should be kept at a healthy weight—not obese, and not too thin. Your chinchilla should have access to a high-quality commercial pelleted food, fresh water, and a high-quality grass hay such as timothy at all times.

A chinchilla's teeth never stop growing so you must provide items to chew to help grind their teeth and keep them at a healthy length.

Children younger than five years old, people with weakened immune systems, and people 65 years of age and older are more likely to get diseases spread between animals and people (also known as zoonotic diseases); contact your health care provider for more information.

It's a good idea to arrange a visit to the veterinarian on your way home from picking up your new chinchilla. The veterinarian will make sure your little one is healthy and can answer any other questions you might have about your new pet.

This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available with in-depth information on chinchillas and their care. Contact your veterinarian for additional information.