



# PENGUIN VETERINARY CENTRE

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## inf caring for ... **Guinea Pigs**

They tend to 'hide' early sickness & so can seem to be very ill very fast.

Most problems are due to inappropriate husbandry:- overcrowding, poor hygiene, a faulty diet, draughts, stress etc, so please take care.

- diet:**
1. GPs are crepuscular rodents, most active, & eating most, at dawn & twilight.
  2. They need a high fibre diet to digest food properly & to wear down their ever-growing teeth. Overgrown & incorrectly aligned teeth are a common & serious problem.
  3. They are opportunistic herbivores, eating grasses, seeds, leaves & fruit. Offer a wide a variety of foods, especially when they are young.
  4. Offer mainly good quality hay, add balanced GP pellets & some fresh mixed-veg, plus occasional fruit & rolled oats. Remove any food not eaten within a few hours. Reserve dried fruit & nut mixes for treats.
  5. Each GP will drink about ½ cup [100-120ml] water daily. Place it in a spill-proof container.
  6. Vitamin C deficiency [scurvy] can cause joint pain, depression, weight loss, dry fur, & a shortened life expectancy. There will also be an increased susceptibility to stresses, a greater incidence of infection, & wounds will be slow to heal. Natural sources of Vitamin C include leafy greens, citrus fruits, tomatos & kiwi fruit. Do not rely on pellets to provide Vit.C; it is safest to give a regular supplement of at least 25mg/day, more when breeding. [you can dissolve soluble Vitamin C tabs in their drinking water, 50mg/ 100ml, & refresh daily].
  7. To nibble their own part-digested faeces [Coprophagy or coecotrophy] is normal & needful
- Encourage hay.** Hay can be fun! for instance, you can hide small 'treats' in it, you can tie it in knots and hang it around the sides of the cage, or hide it inside hollow logs. You can fill a wide cardboard box or baby-pool with loose hay and let your GP go exploring; or build a sturdy 'manger' for the GP to pull hay away from.



**housing:** Provide a safe, sheltered, well ventilated cage with enough room for playing, eating, sleeping, & hiding. Each GP will need at least 1 square metre. They don't climb or jump & 30cm walls contain them, but a roof keeps out cats, rats, dogs & hawks. Free-ranging Guinea Pigs run in groups of 5-10. Commonly, 1 male is kept with a harem of up to 10 females; pairs or 'bachelor colonies' are OK; however, close-housed mixed-sex groups tend to fight, and some pairs just never get along.

**hygiene** Clean their bedding daily. GPs do not 'house-train' and tend to 'poo' everywhere.

**Which litter is best?** wheaten-straw.

Avoid cedar or pine shavings or any chemically treated litter that has a strong aroma: these may cause respiratory problems. Wood shavings are sticky and poorly absorbent, so that urine pools below them. Soft, fluffy litters, pelleted litter, sawdust, or sand, may be eaten & cause severe gastric disturbances.

**weight** About 1kg [650 – 1200g]

**Lifespan** 5-6 years.

**Puberty** females at [4]-8 weeks; males at [9]-12 weeks

**Breeding:** PTO



**Breeding** from 3 months.

**NOTE** If a female GP has not been mated by 5-6 months of age, her pelvis will become too tight to accommodate birth & she can NEVER safely breed. She can be spayed, although it is easier to desex her male companions.

Females breed all year, with a cycle of 15 – 17 days.

When in heat [for about ½ day] they will arch their backs and hold their rear end in the air. After mating, a vaginal 'plug' forms, which dries and falls away in a few days.

To avoid aggression, & 'trampling' of young, house pregnant females separately until their young are weaned, This also prevents conception at the "farrowing- heat", 24-48 hours after birth.

**Pregnancy** lasts 59-72 [average 68] days

They have up to 12 [but usually 4] babies, each weighing 70-110g, & born fully furred with open eyes.

Birth is rapid; if it lasts more than 30 minutes, seek veterinary help.

**Weaning:** GP young scurry & eat solids even on day 1, but are very dependent on their mother and should not be weaned until at least 14, preferably 21 days old [when they weight c 180g] .



**Orphans** under a week old are very hard to rear, & are best fostered to another lactating GP. Penguin Veterinary Centre stocks specific GP milk, made by Wombaroo, which should be fed each 2hrs for the first week, then each 4hrs for the second week, after which they can be gradually weaned. Semi-solids such as dampened pellets can be nibbled from 2 days of age.

**Note:** for at least 14 days, mimic their mum by wiping the belly from the navel downward with a warm damp cloth after each feed, until the bladder has been emptied.

### **Some Common Problems:**



**Mites & lice** are very irritant. [They may make people who pet the GP itch too!] But CAUTION if treatment seems not to stop the irritation: remember GPs chew themselves or each other if [dis]stressed, & can also lose hair due to hormone imbalances, ringworm, or dietary deficiencies. Staphylococcal **pododermatitis** occurs if flooring is too rough, damp, or if hygiene is poor.

**"Lumps"** may be festers, swollen lymph nodes, cysts, pregnancy or tumours [for instance both males & females get breast cancer]. Bring them in for assessment when the lump is first noticed, to increase the chance of successful treatment.

**Worms** & Coccidial scouring are more prevalent in over-moist conditions & when GPs are close-stocked or suffering malnutrition, transport stress etc. Bring in faeces for a 'poo-test' & advice about therapy.