



# Avalon Guinea-Pig Rescue Care Sheet

**(Please note that the information contained within these pages is based on our own experience of caring for and rehabilitating Guinea Pigs)**

## **Taking your pet home:**

When you take your pet home for the first time, they may be a little frightened and unsure of their new surroundings. If you take the time to talk to them in a calming voice and reassure them, then they will start to settle in and may even start to do a little exploring.

Once your pet is in their new cage, please give them some time to adjust and to become familiar with their surroundings. A little handling (and maybe even a veggie treat) will reassure them and make them feel safe. Always make sure that you let your pet see your hands approaching them before you pick them up. It may be that your pet wants to run away from you for a while, but this is a natural survival instinct until they learn that your hands will not harm them. Please don't think that your pet doesn't like you, some Guinea Pigs are just more confident than others, much like humans.

It is important to remember that, while you are getting used to your new pet, they are also getting used to you and your family. It may take time and patience, but it is possible for you to both enjoy each other's company.

## **What your pet likes to eat and drink:**

The main elements of their diet consist of Guinea Pig food pellets/muesli, (which are packed full of Vitamin C), fresh foods such as spinach, kale, broccoli, carrots, cucumber, pepper, and also hay/grass, which they love to graze on and snuggle up to at night time.

### **Dry Food Pellets/Muesli:**

Whilst your new pet has been at Avalon, they may have been introduced to a variety of different dry food mixtures. The main reason for this is so that when they are rehomed, they are familiar with the dry food mix that they are presented with. That said, it is important that when you get your new pet home, the dry food mix should be introduced to them slowly and in small amounts. This is to ensure that they are able to digest the food successfully and that it doesn't upset their stomachs.

Dry food mixtures used by Avalon are:

- Harrington Guinea Pig Pellets
- Gerty Guinea Pig
- Marsdens Pellets (Usually mixed with other dry food mix)
- Rabbit Royale (With added Vitamin C drops/tablets)
- Wagg Guinea Pig Muesli (on occasions)
- Burgess Guinea Pig Nuggets

Once your pet has found a dry food that they enjoy, try to stick to this as much as possible to avoid stomach upsets or selective feeding.

Fresh Vegetables and Fruit:

Fresh foods play a very important role in your Guinea Pigs diet; they also add an extra element of variety and keep their meal times interesting. Vegetables and fruit are also an important, natural source of vitamins, particularly Vitamin C, which Guinea Pigs need. Vitamin C is of particular importance because, unlike many other animal's, Guinea Pigs cannot produce their own Vitamin C. This can lead to a lack of resistance to many diseases.

Ideal vegetables/fruits for Guinea Pigs are:

- Red/Green peppers
- Kale (in small amounts)
- Broccoli (in small amounts)
- Cucumber
- Romaine Lettuce
- Carrot
- Baby Tomato's
- Celery (chopped up into small pieces)
- Parsley
- Apple
- Corn on the cob
- Satsuma segments (seedless)
- Dandelion leaves

Please do not feed your pet cabbage!

Please also make sure that all fresh food is thoroughly washed before feeding it to your pet.

Water:

It is vital that your pet has a supply of fresh water throughout the day and night. A water dish or drinking bottle are both suitable, but they may get a little soggy with a water dish so please check that their fur is not wet in cold weather. You may also like to add a little Vitamin C supplement to the water to help boost their immune system.

For further information please visit our website:  
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Hay:

Like all the other elements of a Guinea Pigs diet, hay plays an important role and should always be available to them. Guinea Pigs are Herbivores meaning that only eat natural plant material. Their digestive system requires that they have a consistent supply of high fibre food to enable it to run healthy and smoothly.

Hay is not only a good source of fibre, it also helps to keep your pets teeth at a suitable length.

### **Bedding:**

The most widely used Guinea Pig bedding materials are newspaper, wood shavings and hay. This combination is ideal for keeping your pets clean and dry. Please be careful however because you sometimes find that wood shavings with either a lot of aroma or a lot of dust in them can cause health problems. Guinea Pigs like to forage close to their cage/hutch floor, thus any fine dust particles can be inhaled. Shavings with big flakes and very little aroma are therefore the best sort.

Tip: always ensure that your pets are removed from their cage/hutch when doing a complete clean out to avoid any unnecessary inhaling of dust.

If your pet has long hair, you may like to try a small animal litter. This works in the same way as cat litter. It absorbs any wetness and prevents their hair getting wet and dirty. It is completely small animal friendly as it is made from recycled paper and is odourless when in use. (A brand recommended by Avalon Rescue is 'back-2-nature') This is best used in indoor cages as it doesn't provide as much warmth as shavings in a wooden hutch.

Please change your pets bedding at least once a week, particularly when the weather is cold as it can stay wetter for longer.

### **Physical Care:**

If your pet has long hair they will need regular brushing. Combs used for Persian cats are best for this. Please make sure that, if they have long hair, there is nothing in their cage that they might get it caught in.

Please also check their nails regularly as they continuously grow and from time to time, approximately once a month, need cutting with clippers. Normal nail clippers can be used for this or alternatively, you can buy specialised small animal clippers.

When clipping your pet's nails, make sure that you don't take too much off in any one go. It is always best to take a little off at a time to ensure that you don't catch the blood supply at the end of their nail. This can be difficult, particularly with dark claws, so if you would prefer please make an appointment to bring your pets to Avalon and we will clip their nails for you.

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Guinea Pigs' teeth also continuously grow, so it is useful to place something wooden in their cage so that they can gnaw on it and help them to maintain strong, healthy teeth. Alternatively, something simple like a used toilet roll tube works just as well.

## **Illness:**

Guinea Pigs are very good at hiding illness. This is again due to their survival instinct, thus it is vital to know your own pet's habits and characteristics so that you are able to tell when they are feeling under the weather.

**Eyes:** should be clear, bright and free of discharge. Guinea Pigs do produce a milky fluid from their tear ducts when they clean themselves. This is usually wiped away with the inside of their paw and is perfectly normal. If your pet's eye looks opaque, red swollen/inflamed or crusty, please seek veterinary advice.

**Hair and Skin:** should be clean, glossy (depending on breed), full coat and free of patches/scabs. If you discover any patches on fur missing, in our experience, this is likely to be a result of either mites or fungal. Although this may look severe, if treated immediately this can be resolved relatively quickly. Your pet may be irritable while they are undergoing treatment as the affected area is likely to be very itchy.

**Ears:** should be smooth and not scruffy. Check regularly for a build-up of wax. If you have any concerns, please seek veterinary advice. Do not attempt to clean your pet's ears yourself as you may damage their ear and/or ear drum.

**Nose:** should be clear with no signs of discharge or watery fluid. A watery or crusty nose may be a result of an upper respiratory infection and may require urgent veterinary treatment.

**Weight:** It is a good idea to weigh your pet on a regular basis to ensure that they are not putting weight on excessively or similarly, to check that they are not losing weight.

**Breathing:** should be quiet and not laboured. If you should hear either a clicking or rattling it could be the sign of a respiratory infection and veterinary advice should be sought.

Other signs to look out for are if your pet loses their appetite or stops drinking. Alternatively, they may not seem themselves and become quiet and withdrawn. If your pet shows any of the above symptoms, please take them to see a vet as soon as possible for treatment.

## **Exercise:**

Exercise plays a vital role in your pet's well-being. It is also the perfect opportunity for your pet to interact and investigate (Something they can get very good at). Both indoor and outdoor pens are ideal for this; however please make sure that there is someone available to check on your pets at regular intervals as they should not be left unattended at any time.

If your pet is in an average size cage/hutch, it is recommended that they have at least 3-4 hours of free range time daily. This allows them to stretch their legs and work their muscles. They thoroughly enjoy running around and going on little adventures. When they are particularly happy, they will even start leaping into the air ('Popcorning') to show their excitement which is really lovely to watch. This often leads to them becoming more vocal too!!

### **Indoor pens:**

Indoor pens are ideal at times when the weather may be cold or damp. It is important that the chosen place is safe and there are no electrical cables, phone wires or house plants within reach. It is also important to ensure that there are no small hiding places, (i.e. between/underneath cupboards, behind sofas) and that any expensive furniture is kept away from possible nibbling.

It is also important that all other family members are aware that your pets are 'out and about' and that any other family pets are kept at a safe distance.

### **Outdoor pens:**

Outdoor pens are ideal to use during the warmer weather, but make sure that your pets are not out in the midday sun as Guinea Pigs can die from heatstroke. Outdoor pens also provide your pet with the opportunity to graze which is a natural attribute and is what they would do in the wild. It is vital that the area your pets have access to has not been treated with any pesticides and/or weed treatment. This could seriously harm your pet so please thoroughly check the area before allowing them to roam. Similarly, check that the area has not been used as a toilet by other animals.

Do not place your pet on damp grass; always ensure that the grass has dried out before allowing your pets to roam. A good tip is to pat any damp grass dry using a towel beforehand.

Outdoor pens should be placed in a sheltered, secure area out of direct sunlight. Either a concrete or grassy areas are suitable providing that your pets are supervised at all times. Unlike Rabbits, Guinea Pigs do not burrow, so providing that all possible escape routes are suitably blocked off, and any weak points secured, your pets should remain safely inside.

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Please remember: your pets should have access to fresh food and water at all times, even when in their pens.

### **Housing:**

Guinea Pigs can happily live in either wooden hutches or plastic/wire indoor cages, providing that they are safe and secure. It is recommended that your pet has at least five times its body length in cage space to allow them to move and stretch.

Whether your pets are in a wooden hutch or plastic cage, it is vital that they are kept away from drafts, particularly in the winter months. If your pets are kept outside, ensure that you have sufficient covers to protect your pet's house overnight.

### **Cage cleaning:**

Keeping your Guinea Pigs clean and dry is essential for their health and wellbeing. It is important that once a day/every other day you 'spot clean' their house. This involves clearing away the areas that have been soiled and replacing with fresh shavings/hay. It is also important to remove any uneaten hay because it can become damp and unpleasant for your pets to eat/sleep on.

As well as spot cleaning, your pet's hutch/cage should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected once a week. This involves removing your pet and emptying the entire contents of their home. You will then need to lightly spray a small animal friendly cage disinfectant around their hutch/cage, paying particular attention to areas they soil the most. Leave for a few minutes and then refill with fresh bedding and hay. Once all the bedding and hay has been placed in the cage, allow a few minutes for any dust particles to settle before reintroducing your pet.

### **Handling:**

Guinea Pigs are naturally nervous by nature, so when it comes to handling they will often run and hide. However, many will become quiet tame and may even learn to stand still when they think you are going to lift them up.

The most important thing to remember is to approach your pet from the front so that they aren't startled when you go to pick them up. Talking to your pet and stroking them before attempting to lift them can also help to calm them down. It is also important to make your pet feel safe at all times. When you do lift your pet from their cage, make sure that you have one hand around their middle (tummy) and one hand supporting their bottom and back legs. Once your pet has been lifted, make sure they are placed either onto your chest where they can be held close, or on your legs if you are seated. Holding your pet in these ways allows them to assess their surroundings and reassures them that they are secure.

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Please remember that Guinea Pigs have delicate bodies. When handling your pet, please do not squeeze or crush them. Be firm, confident and calm and they will learn to trust you in time.

### **Remember:**

*If I am a happy, healthy pig, I can live up to 9 years old!!*

### **Final thoughts....**

1. Any separation from you will be very painful.
2. Give me time to understand what you want of me.
3. Place your trust in me. It is crucial for my well-being.
4. Talk to me. Even if I don't understand your words, I understand your voice when it's speaking to me.
5. Remember that I have teeth but I choose not to bite you.
6. Take care of me when I get old. You, too, will grow old.
7. Go with me on difficult journeys. Everything is easier for me if you are there.

