Guinea Pig Facts

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

- Guinea pigs were first kept by the Incas in Peru, South America.
- They are diurnal, which means they are awake during the day.
- Guinea pigs have 4 toes on each front and 3 toes on each back foot.
- Wild guinea pigs range in size from that of a rat to that of a small dog.
- Guinea pigs have very tender feet; they need cages with solid floors.

Guinea pigs can make wonderful pets. They are friendly and very playful. They also have a wide range of vocal abilities. Depending on their mood, guinea pigs will grunt, squeak, wheek, coo, gurgle, and chirrup. When excited they will also "popcorn", or jump straight up and down. There are about 14 species of wild guinea pigs. All are native to, or found in, South America. The scientific name of the variety most often kept as a pet is *Cavia porcellus*. This name in part means "suckling piglet." But guinea pigs are not pigs. Instead, they are rodents, like their closest relatives - porcupines and chinchillas. Guinea pigs are also known as cavies, because of their scientific name. They are very social animals who, in the wild, live in fairly large groups. As a pet, they need a loyal, caring human friend or other cavy companions.

What Is It Called?

Common Name	Technical Name
Father	Boar
Mother	Sow
Baby	Pup
Group	Group

Guinea Pigs Around the World

Language	Name for Guinea Pigs
French	cobaye
German	meerschweinchen
Spanish	cobayo
Russian	morskaya swinya

The Most Common Question About Guinea Pigs

What should I feed my guinea pig?

Guinea pigs are herbivores. This means your cavy can only eat plants, fruits, and vegetables. They do not eat meat. In the savannahs, or flat grasslands, of South America, wild guinea pigs eat grasses, herbs, weeds, and wild fruits and vegetables. They also drink a fair amount of water. In part, your guinea pig's diet should be based on the foods he would eat if living in the wild.

However, cavies, like humans, are different than most other animals. We and our guinea pig friends cannot manufacture our own Vitamin C. Most animals produce this water-soluble nutrient within their bodies. This is done by changing glucose, which is a simple sugar, into ascorbic acid, which is Vitamin

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C. This change takes place in either the liver or kidneys, depending on the animal. A lack of Vitamin C can cause serious health problems and diseases.

To prevent Vitamin C deficiency, you should feed your guinea pig a specially formulated pellet diet. In addition, a fresh supply of Timothy Hay should always be available. Timothy Hay both aids digestion and helps wear down your guinea pig's continually growing teeth. Other good food sources include a variety of fruits and vegetables. Cavy favorites include green vegetables, carrots, green cabbage, lettuce (not iceberg), and a small apple slice.

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