Nutrition in Guineas: Why Vitamin C is Essential

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

the importance of vitamin C for your Guinea Pig

Guinea pigs share a unique quality with human beings: the inability to synthesize (create) Vitamin C for their bodies. Because this is true, Vitamin C must be supplied to guinea pigs through food or supplement intake. Guinea pigs failing to receive adequate levels of Vitamin C will develop the disease, that in people, is known as scurvy.

What causes scurvy?

In human history, scurvy was common among sailors who traveled long distances without access to fruits and vegetables containing Vitamin C. In 1747, James Lind, a Scotsman, discovered that sailors suffering from scurvy were cured by eating oranges and limes. Science has since shown that it was the Vitamin C in the fruit that made the difference.

Symptoms of scurvy in your guinea pig

Indicators of a Vitamin C deficiency in guinea pigs include loss of appetite, bleeding from the gums, joint stiffness, general lethargy, weight loss, poor tooth development and nasal discharge.

Avoiding Vitamin C deficiency

To help guinea pigs avoid a deficiency, Vitamin C is often added to food pellets at the time of manufacture. Under normal conditions the Vitamin C in food pellets remains active for up to three months. Under adverse conditions - too much heat or humidity for example - Vitamin C may lose its effectiveness in much less time. Buying food pellets one month at a time and properly rotating fresh food into the guinea pig's diet will help ensure that the Vitamin C in the diet is at adequate levels.

Foods high in Vitamin C

Feeding a guinea pig a diet with Vitamin C rich fresh fruits and vegetables is also important. The following fruits and vegetables contain high levels of Vitamin C:

- Leafy greens such as kale, parsley, spinach and chicory
- Cabbage
- Red and green peppers
- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Peas
- Tomatoes
- Dandelion Greens (no pesticides, fertilizer, or herbicides)
- Kiwi
- Oranges

Additional ways to provide your guinea pig with Vitamin C

Some suggest adding Vitamin C to a guinea pig's drinking water. This can be helpful, but Vitamin C in water breaks down in less than a day. New Vitamin C and fresh water must be supplied daily with this method.

WE RECOMMEND

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Kaytee Fiesta Guinea Pig contains the Vitamin C your guinea pig requires.

Oxbow Daily C for Guinea Pigs is a delicious pineapple flavored tablet containing 50 mg of Vitamin C.

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