Chinchilla Facts

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

- Chinchillas are named after a South American Indian Tribe, the Chinchas.
- They are crepuscular, which means they become active at twilight, or dusk.
- Pet chinchillas have a long lifespan; they can live up to 22 years in captivity.
- When scared, some chinchillas give off a smell similar to burnt almonds.
- Chinchillas have strong back legs that allow them to jump very, very high.

Chinchillas are special animals. They are native to, or found in, the South American countries of Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Argentina. They live in the Andes Mountains at altitudes up to 16,500 feet. Humans would not enjoy living at this height. The ground is rocky and few plants grow. The air can also be extremely cold. Chinchillas are members of the rodent family. They are related to guinea pigs, rats, mice, squirrels, beavers, and porcupines. They communicate with a series of chirps, peeps, and cackles. They also make a "kee-kee-kee" sound when they are scared or angry. Long-tailed chinchillas are the most common pet chinchilla. Their scientific name is *Chinchilla lanigera*. This name means, in part, "wooly," because of their soft fur. Like other rodents, they have teeth that continually grow throughout their lifetime. Therefore, their diet should consist of large amounts of Timothy Hay. This aids digestion and helps wear down their teeth. Other foods should include special pellet diets made just for chinchillas and fresh water. They also enjoy small pieces of fruit or single raisins.

What Is It Called?

Common Name	Technical Name
Father	Buck
Mother	No name, though some people call them "Does"
Baby	No name
Group	Colony

Chinchillas Around the World

Language	Name for Chinchillas
French	chinchilla
German	chinchilla
Italian	cincilla
Spanish	chinchilla
Hungarian	csincsilla
Polish	szynszyla

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*

The Most Common Question About Chinchillas

Why is my chinchilla's fur so soft?

Chinchillas have very thick and soft fur. Some people believe the fur of a chinchilla is the softest of any animal in the world. Interestingly, their fur is so thick that parasites, such as the fleas and ticks that may harm other pets, have much difficulty getting through the hair to the skin. But you should still have your chinchilla regularly checked by your veterinarian. The reason your chinchilla's fur is soft is simple. Chinchillas have between 60 and 80 hairs per hair follicle. In contrast, humans have only one - maybe two - hairs per hair follicle!

To keep their fur soft, clean, and healthy, chinchillas need frequent baths. But chinchillas do not take water baths like you might. Instead, they bathe in a special dust. This is a finely ground powder made, preferably, from mountain pumice or volcanic ash. Your chinchilla will twist, roll, kick, and dig in the sand to bathe. It is good for your chinchilla but even more fun to watch! But care still needs to be taken. Since your chinchilla's eyes are so large, constant exposure to their bathing dust could cause unnecessary eye injuries. The best way to let your chinchilla bathe is to place his dust bath into his cage 2-3 times a week for a 20-60 minutes a day.

*Unauthorized use of any images, thumbnails, illustrations, descriptions, article content, or registered trademarks of **Foster & Smith, Inc.** is strictly prohibited under copyright law. Site content, including photography, descriptions, pricing, promotions, and availability are subject to change without notice. These restrictions are necessary in order to protect not only our copyrighted intellectual property, but also the health of pets, since articles or images that are altered or edited after download could result in misinformation that may harm companion animals, aquatic life, or native species.*