

# Nutrition in Guinea: Why Vitamin C is Essential

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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. Similarly, Guinea Pigs need vitamin C supplemented in their diet to prevent this disease.

## **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, premium food manufacturers often add Vitamin C 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. You may also wish to add Vitamin C to your Guinea Pig's diet with [Oxbow Natural Science Vitamin C Tabs](#). These delicious tablets are made with Guinea Pig favorite Timothy Hay, and are a delicious way to ensure your cavy gets enough Vitamin C.

### We Recommend



Kaytee Fiesta Guinea Pig



Oxbow Natural Science Vitamin C



Wide-Mouth Water Bottles