



MACRITCHIE VET ERINARY PRACTICE

Beechwood Veterinary Centre
139 Glasgow Road, Baillieston
Glasgow G69 6TA
Tel. 0141 771 5565
Open: Mon-Fri 8.30am to 7pm,
Sat 8.30am-1.30pm

Low Waters Veterinary Centre
84 Portland Place
Hamilton
Tel. 01698 283400
Open: Mon-Fri 8.30am to 7pm
Sat 9am-11am

Consultations by appointment
24-hour emergency service

FACTSHEET: GUINEA PIGS 2 of 2

Exercise and Making Friends

Most guinea pigs are friendly little animals which rarely scratch or bite. They can become very tame as long as they are handled correctly. To pick one up, slide your hand across its shoulders with your thumb tucked behind its shoulder and fingers wrapped around its chest. Support the hind-quarters with your other hand. Having fun with your guinea pig means encouraging its favourite pastimes - eating, exploration, and exercise. If you watch your guinea pig's natural behaviour and preferences, you can come up with new toys and activities that will enrich his life and enhance your experience as a pet owner.

Offering a little apple or orange with the peel still on it will be greatly appreciated by your guinea pig - just be careful to avoid those sharp incisor teeth and wash your hands before you eat the rest!

Adding new play objects and rearranging the cage can be fun for both of you. Think of the basic guinea pig enclosure, equipped with soft bedding, water bottle and food dishes, as only a starting point. Keeping in mind that your guinea pig needs ample floor space to run around, you can add cage extras like rocks, bricks, clay flowerpots and fruit tree branches to his cage. Four-inch diameter PVC pipes are also popular! A guinea pig's eyes are situated on the sides of the head, meaning that guinea pigs may be bad at judging distances or heights. It is best not to allow your guinea pig to climb more than 10 inches off the ground as it may have problems getting down safely. A fall can mean broken bones or internal injuries that could prove fatal. Likewise always make sure you are holding your guinea pig securely when carrying it.

Enjoy watching your guinea pig explore. He's wearing down his toenails and exercising while he investigates the new setup. Some guinea pigs like bird toys with mirrors, or balls with bells inside them. Just make sure that all objects you put in the cage can withstand a little chewing!

Rodent wheels are not suited to guinea pigs.

A large outdoor run made of netting on a timber frame will allow them to graze in safety, but you should make sure that there is always some cover available. If you let them run around indoors, watch out for dangerous things that they could chew such as electric cables. Guinea pigs will also chew furniture if allowed! Also make sure that they are safe from cats or dogs that may try to hurt them.

Breeding

The most important aspect of guinea pig breeding is that if females are going to be bred, then they MUST be bred between 4 and 7 months of age. If breeding occurs after 7 months, serious and often fatal (to both female and young) problems associated with delivery frequently occur. The pelvis of the female fuses at an early age, decreasing the size of the birth canal. Young are very large when born, and will not be able to pass through the canal of an older guinea pig. Delivery will therefore be impossible without a caesarean section. If they are bred early, the mother's pelvis is able to expand under the influence of certain hormones and she will rarely have complications with delivery.

The young are well developed at birth. They are born with their eyes open, are fully furred and should be on their feet within an hour of delivery. Pups are also able to eat solid food and drink from a bowl within hours to just three days after birth, but it is recommended to allow them to suckle for three weeks.

Male guinea pigs (boars) will show sexual awareness as early as 3 to 4 weeks old, but are unable to produce viable sperm until 11 to 17 weeks of age. Males should be at least 4 months old before breeding.