

CHINCHILLAS AS PETS

Chinchillas make great pets for older children and adults. They're easy to look after, friendly and inquisitive. With plenty of care and attention they can become very tame. Chinchillas are timid by nature and are very sensitive to rough handling so they're **not** suitable pets for very young children. As they're nocturnal, chinchillas sleep throughout the day and become active in the evening. Keeping chinchillas as pets is a **longterm** commitment as they can live between 15-20 years.

DO I LIKE COMPANY?



Whilst chinchillas can be kept on their own, keeping them in single sex pairs provides them with companionship and it means they can snuggle up with each other at nap times. If you'd like to keep more than one chinchilla, make sure you buy them at the same time as they'll already be friends. It can be difficult to introduce chinchillas to one another later on.

WHERE DO I LIKE TO LIVE?

Chinchillas are very active and need lots of space to exercise so buy the biggest cage you can afford. Ideally, the cage should have several levels or shelves to allow your pets to bounce around their cage. As chinchillas are enthusiastic chewers, a wire mesh cage is essential to ensure that they can't chew their way out. Provide a bedroom or a space where they can snuggle up - a nesting box full of hay or other cosy bedding material will help them feel secure.

Position their cage away from direct sunlight, radiators or draughts. Chinchillas don't like high temperatures and can suffer from heat stroke which can be very serious if not treated quickly.

A chinchilla marble is great for keeping your pets cool in warm weather. Cool the marble in your fridge and then pop it in their cage for a long-lasting cool spot.

WHAT DO I EAT?

Good quality chinchilla pellets will provide a good basic diet for your pets. Whilst in our care, we feed them Pets at Home chinchilla pellets and recommend that you continue to do so – this will

help to minimise stress caused by a change of food at the same time as being taken to a new home. If you do wish

to change their diet, introduce new food slowly over a period of about 10 days, phasing out the old food completely. This gradual introduction will allow their digestive system to become accustomed to the new food.

A supply of good quality hay, such as Timothy Hay, should always be readily available in your pets' cage. Hay provides essential fibre and helps chinchillas to digest their food. It also helps to grind their teeth down, preventing them from growing too long and becoming painful.

Chinchillas always appreciate treats but it is important to ensure that they are low in sugar and fats. Take a look at the treat section in your local Pets at Home store for ideas and treats that are specifically designed for your pet. Dried fruit or vegetables and breakfast cereals can also be given but only in very small quantities. Dried fruit can have high levels of sugar and other items like sunflower seeds are high in fat so should be strictly rationed.

Secure their feeding bowl onto the cage or provide heavy earthenware bowls to avoid them being tipped over. Remove uneaten food and ensure that their feeding bowls and bottles are cleaned and refilled daily.

PLAYTIME

The easiest way to entertain a chinchilla is to keep more than one – they're very sociable pets and will keep each other company. Providing toys and stimulating natural behaviour by hiding treats around their cage will keep them amused and stimulate natural feeding.

In addition, branches and shelves allow your chinchilla to exercise by jumping around the cage. Chinchillas love to chew, so provide lots of wooden blocks or natural toys. For example, the Woodlands Coconut Hideaways provide hours of fun and stimulation.

Regular playtime out of the cage is essential but make sure it's safe to let your pets out as they'll chew anything in sight. A small pet playpen is useful as you can keep an eye on them whilst they play.

HOW TO HANDLE ME

When you first take your chinchillas home, give them a day or two to get used to their new surroundings without being disturbed. You should then start talking to them so that they get to know your voice. The next step is to introduce your hand into their cage and perhaps offer a treat.

Over time you'll be able to stroke and gently pick them up. You should hold your pet close to your chest and facing you with one hand over its back and one hand supporting its bottom. Hold your chinchilla firmly but gently so that it feels secure. It's important that you handle your pets regularly to develop their confidence and maintain your relationship with them.

Chinchillas do wriggle a lot but they'll soon become docile and will enjoy being handled. They're very sensitive to rough handling and may occasionally bite. If your pets start to shed their coats, this is a sign that they're either distressed or that you're holding them too tightly.

KEEPING ME CLEAN

Chinchillas are clean pets. Replace soiled bedding daily and clean the entire cage thoroughly once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant.



KEEPING ME FIT AND HEALTHY

A healthy diet and hygienic conditions will help to keep your chinchillas in good health but there are a few potential problems that you should be aware of.

As with all rodents, chinchillas' teeth grow constantly so it's important to provide hay and wooden toys or mineral stones for gnawing on. Cuttlebone is also great to gnaw on and provides calcium too.

Chinchillas like to keep their soft fur clean and love a good dust bath! It may seem unusual but bathing in special chinchilla dust is a vital part of their grooming routine. Place a chinchilla bath filled with dust in their cage and leave it in for about five minutes at a time. Your pets should bathe several times a week to keep their coat shiny and clean. Take care not to leave the bath in their cage as they may use it as a toilet.

Regularly grooming your pets with a brush or comb will strengthen the bond between you and will help to keep their coats in good condition.

TOP TIPS FOR HEALTHY PETS

Dental

Gnawing toys are an essential part of your pets' dental routine and should always be available as they help to prevent overgrown teeth.

Vitamins and supplements

Vitamins can be added to your pets' food or water. Probiotic supplements can help to maintain healthy digestion and relieve stress. Getting used to their new surroundings can be stressful for your chinchillas so consider buying probiotic supplements before you take them home. Hay is essential to aid digestion and it's also good for your pets' teeth.

Grooming

Groom your chinchillas once a week to keep their skin and coats healthy and to strengthen the bond between you and your pets. Regular grooming can also help to highlight health problems.

Cleaning & hygiene

Clean your pets' home thoroughly once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant.

All pet owners have a responsibility to look after and care for their pets. If you're thinking about having chinchillas as pets, learn as much as you can about how to care for them beforehand. You should take your lifestyle and household into account when deciding whether you can offer them a good home. This leaflet explains chinchillas' basic needs so you can decide if they're right for you...