

CHINCHILLA CARE INFORMATION

Chinchillas are quick, curious and athletic animals. They live an average of fifteen years or more, so they are a long term commitment. Chinchillas are typically not cuddly lap pets. Even the nicest chinchilla can be tricky to pick up, and they prefer running around to having a snuggle. Chinchillas are nocturnal. They prefer to sleep during the day, and they need attention and playtime in the evening. Chinchillas are fast and avid chewers. They will chew books, papers, clothes, wood, baseboards, furniture, wires, cords, plastic, etc. Keeping them cooped up in their cage is not an acceptable solution to prevent chewing. Chinchillas require daily exercise. They need at least one to two hours (more is better) of supervised time out of their cage everyday in a large chin-proofed area. Chinchillas are susceptible to heat stroke. You must have air conditioning, as chins start to become uncomfortable at 70 to 75 degrees, and higher temperatures can be dangerous.

Chinchillas are highly social tribe animals and need the companionship of their own species. It is unnatural for them to live alone. Chinchillas should always be kept in at least pairs, either the same gender or spayed and neutered. Introductions between single chinchillas can be very successful if handled properly and patiently.

CAGE

There is no such thing as a habitat that is too big. Your chinchillas will be spending a majority of their time in their cage, so it should be as big as possible. It should be safe, roomy, comfortable and interesting. The cage should be a minimum of four feet tall, three feet wide and two feet deep. The cage should not have any ladders or tubes. Several solid wooden platform perches should be provided, about six to eight inches apart. Any levels in the cage should be solid, not wire. Animals should never be made to stand on wire. Standing on wire is extremely painful and will cause wounds, sores, foot deformities and arthritis. Wire levels can be made safe by covering them completely with ceramic tiles.

We highly recommend the Chinchilla Mansion (with ½" x 1" mesh) from Quality Cages. The website is www.qualitycage.com. The Midwest Cat Playpen, Model #132 and the Kennel-Aire Playpen for Cats and Small Animals are acceptable second choices. The Midwest and Kennel-Aire cages are both available from various retailers online.

Clean your chinchillas' habitat at least once a week.

BEDDING

Use Carefresh Bedding. It is the safest and healthiest bedding choice for your chinchillas. It is made from recycled wood pulp and is available at most pet stores. Aspen bedding is an acceptable second choice. Never use pine, cedar, sawdust, corn cob bedding, chlorophyll bedding or cat litter. Pine and cedar are poisonous to all animals! We usually have 50 Liter bags of Carefresh bedding available for purchase through the rescue.

HIDE-AWAY

Chinchillas enjoy a cozy space for sleeping and relaxation. Provide a wooden nesting box – large enough for both/all of your chinchillas to fit into. Do not use plastic. Do not use the edible “snack shack” type hide-aways.

WATER BOTTLE

Use a 16 ounce or 32 ounce hanging water bottle that has an angled stainless steel sipper tube with a ball bearing in the spout. A glass water bottle is highly recommended, but a plastic water bottle is acceptable. Glass water bottles can often be found with bird supplies. If you use a plastic water bottle, you will need a water bottle guard. Give your chinchillas fresh water everyday. Filtered water is best.

FOOD

Provide a heavy ceramic crock-type food dish or a metal dish that clips onto the cage. Do not use plastic. Chinchilla pellets should be plain. There should not be any seeds, nuts, corn, dried

fruit or other bits mixed in with the pellets. We recommend **Oxbow Chinchilla Deluxe**. Oxbow is available from www.oxbowhay.com and a variety of other online retailers. Oxbow is also available at some pet stores, feed stores, veterinary practices and through Small Angels Rescue. **Do not** use Kaytee, Hartz, L&M or Nutriphase products. They contain a controversial antioxidant preservative called Ethoxyquin which is linked to cancer, organ damage, birth defects and other serious health problems. Large quantities of fresh foods are not recommended for chinchillas. Treats, such as goji berries or a small piece of dried fruit, should be given sparingly – one or two small pieces per day at the most.

Do not give your chinchillas a mineral or salt wheel. They are not necessary or healthy. Mineral and salt wheels are made with glue, and salt wheels are bleached. You can give your chinchillas natural wood chews that have not been artificially colored and/or dried apple branches from apple trees that have not been sprayed with pesticides.

HAY

It is vital that chinchillas have unlimited access to timothy hay or orchard grass (and once in a while alfalfa hay) at all times. Hay promotes a healthy digestive system and keeps their teeth worn down.

EXERCISE and PLAY

Chinchillas are extremely athletic. They need time out of their habitat everyday to run around in a large chinchilla proofed area. Chinchillas need at least one to two hours of daily play time. More is better! Hammocks, tunnels and perches are fun enrichment items. Check out www.busybunny.com and www.leithpetwerks.com for lots of fun, safe and edible toys that are appropriate for chinchillas. Many chinchillas also enjoy “watching” TV when they do have to be in their cage.

Chinchillas need and enjoy an exercise wheel or flying saucer. The exercise wheel should be at least 15 inches in diameter. It should provide a solid running surface. Never use an exercise wheel with metal or plastic bars/rungs. Their feet, legs and/or tail can slip between the rungs, get caught and break. We recommend the Flying Saucer or the 15 inch Chin Spin from Quality Cages. The website is www.qualitycage.com.

NEVER put your chinchillas in an exercise ball. Exercise balls are dangerous and stressful. In a ball their vision is compromised. They always run into furniture and walls, which they don't see coming. It's like a car crash for them. They back up to try and get away and end up crashing into something else. It's very stressful. In addition, paws can get pinched/broken in the air slits. Chinchillas can become over-heated. If they go to the bathroom in the ball, they have to run in their own waste. Also, their great joy in life is exploring and checking things out with their paws and noses. They can't do that in a plastic bubble. Provide a large, safe play area for your chinchillas and trash the ball!

DUST BATH

Chinchillas require a dust bath to keep their fur clean and properly groomed. The bathing dust/sand can be purchased online and at most pet stores. Offer access to the dust bath approximately every other day. You can reuse the sand as long as it is clean and not soiled by urine, hay, food, etc. Make sure to use unscented sand.

HANDLING

Before you pick your chinchillas up, make sure you have clean, dry hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your chinchillas are fully awake and aware of your presence. Even the tamest chinchilla can be tricky to pick up. Place both hands securely around their body, supporting their rear, and gently lift them up. Hold your chinchilla securely against your chest.

Please visit www.chincare.com for more detailed chinchilla care information.

Interested in chinchillas?

Please email chinchillas@smallangelsrescue.org or call 301-668-0404. You can see our adoptable animals online at www.smallangels.petfinder.com.

