

Feeding your Guinea Pig - Written

By Doctor Peter Ricci

The guinea pig (*Cavia porcellus*) is a member of the rodent family and make popular pets. It is important to consider a healthy, appropriate and well balanced diet when feeding your pet guinea pig.

This will ensure it remains happy and healthy.



So what are the basic nutritional requirements of a guinea pig?

Guinea pigs require a diet that is comprised of approximately 16-18% protein, 35% fibre with some fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals.

If your guinea pig is still young and growing it requires a slightly higher level of protein, about 20%.

Pregnant and lactating sows require an even higher level of protein, about 22%.



Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) is a dietary essential for a Guinea Pig, meaning that it must be provided daily in their food, as guinea pigs are unable to produce or store vitamin C in their body.

Deficiencies of vitamin C can lead to ill health in a guinea pig, causing a disease known as scurvy. A normal guinea pig requires about 5 mg of vitamin C for every 1kg of its body weight, while pregnant sows require a higher dose of about 30mg per 1kg of body weight.

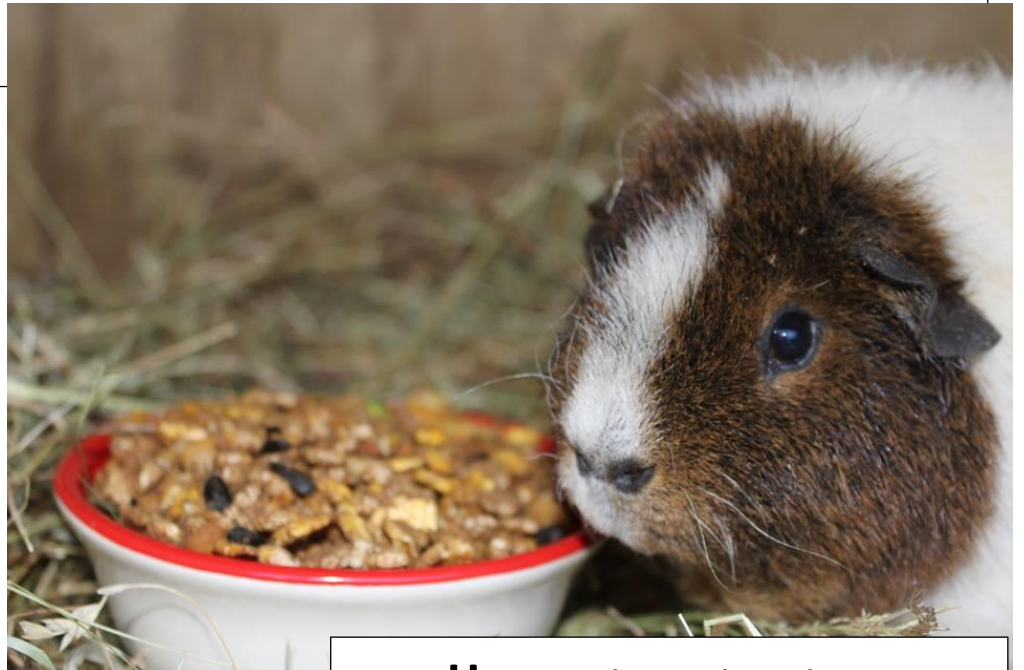


Water

Although a guinea pig's water requirement is minimal, it is important that your pet guinea pig has clean fresh water on offer at all times. This can be provided easily with a drinker bottle attached to the cage.

How do you provide a healthy diet for your pet guinea pig?

It is very simple. There are several good commercial guinea pig pellets and muesli mixes available which will provide most of the nutrient requirements of a guinea pig. Guinea pig pellets or muesli can be offered ad-lib to the animal. Good guinea pig muesli usually contains Lucerne chaff, lupins, barley and oats. These are the most common ingredients but can include almost any grain/chaff ingredient eg wheat, corn, safflower, sunflower oaten/wheaten chaff etc. Guinea pig pellets are produced with similar ingredients with better quality brands produced to meet specific requirements for essential amino acids, vitamins and minerals.



Hay Fresh good quality oaten or meadow hay offered daily will provide much needed fibre, while good quality Lucerne hay provides both fibre and a good source of protein. Supplementing oaten or meadow hay with Lucerne hay will help to provide growing, pregnant and lactating guinea pigs with the extra protein that they require.





A daily supply of fresh fruits, vegetables and/or grasses should also be offered to your guinea pig. Any vitamins and minerals that are lacking in pellets, muesli or hay can be provided by feeding fruits, vegetables and grasses including all the vitamin C that is required by a guinea pig. Carrots, apples, pear, water melon, pumpkin, capsicum, sweet potato and leafy green vegetables such as celery, bok choy, cabbage, broccoli, spinach and parsley are just some of the suitable fruits and vegetables that can be offered to guinea pigs. Lettuce should not be fed at all to your guinea pig as they can cause diarrhea. Vitamin C supplements can also be added where fruit and vegetables are not regularly offered.



Some pet shops offer salt licks for guinea pigs, however, these can have a negative affect on the growth of the guinea pigs teeth. Salt licks can provide an extra amount of minerals to the guinea pig, which in turn encourage the guinea pig's teeth to over grow. All necessary minerals can be supplied in a good diet of muesli &/or pellets, hay and most importantly a selection of fresh fruit and vegetables and grasses. **Auckland Cavy Club offers a selection of food & bedding products and water bottles for sale at our club shows. All profits go to support the club.**