

Chinchilla – Basic Care

- Commonly housed in pairs of opposite sexes put together at an early age.
- Must take dust baths to clean and care for the fur.
- Chinchillas release some of their fur from the follicles when attacked, frightened, or stressed. It takes about 5 months for the lost fur to grow back.
- Chinchillas have more fur per square inch than any other known land animal.
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
 - Food treats – raisins, sunflower seeds, and apples
 - Timothy hay
 - PVC tubes
 - Exercise wheels
- Minimum cage sizes should be appropriate for the animal's size with plenty of room for activity. Chinchillas prefer vertical cages for climbing.
- Should be fed commercially prepared chinchilla pelleted diets that are balanced for proper nutrition.
- Food and water should be provided ad libitum.
- To pick up a chinchilla, the tail is grasped near the base and the body held around the shoulders and head.
- Females are called does, and are generally larger. Males are called bucks.
- Chinchillas belong to the same family as the guinea pig.
- Nocturnal for the most part, sleep during the day and are more active from early evening and into the night.
- The reward system works equally as well for a chinchilla as for a dog.
- Considered to be very clean animals, under normal circumstances, have no detectable odor. If frightened they tend to give off a pungent scorched almond odor.
- Average lifespan of a pet chinchilla is over ten years.
- Chinchillas can make crying and barking noises, but seldom make more than a chattering or chirping and a cracking vocalization if angry.
- Indigenous to the Andes Mountains, found 3,000 to 15,000 feet elevation.
- Normally chinchillas have a gentle nature, but if frightened or cornered they will bite.
- When threatened they depend more on their running and jumping abilities and lightning fast agility.
- For more specific species information, including physiologic data, husbandry and breeding requirements, or procedural information, please contact the Office of Laboratory Animal Care (865-974-5634).