

Basic Care – Guinea Pigs

- Extremely docile animals and rarely bite their handlers or cage mates.
- Social animals, do well when group housed on contact bedding.
- Cannot climb or jump well because of short legs and stocky bodies.
- Often vocalize and are much louder than most rodents.
- Easily startled and must be approached slowly to avoid causing a panic reaction (stampede).
- Enrichment should be provided unless specified in protocol and approved by the IACUC.
- Examples of enrichment:
 - Food treats
 - Timothy hay cubes
 - Plastic light weight dumbbells
 - Cardboard or PVC tubes
- Guinea pigs are especially susceptible to respiratory disease and should not be exposed to drafts or temperature extremes.
- They have a gram positive intestinal flora and treatment with drugs such as penicillin can cause diarrhea and death.
- Male is called a boar and the female is called a sow
- Females bred for the first time after seven months of age have fused pubic symphysis and will have dystocia.
- Should be fed a high quality, commercially prepared pelleted diets that are balanced for proper nutrition and rich in vitamin C to prevent scurvy. Feed must be used before vitamin C degrades (typically within 3 months of milling date).
- Food and water should be fed ad libitum.
- Guinea pigs waste large amounts of food and water. They tend to sit inside their feeder/food dish and urinate and defecate in it. Feeders which prevent the animal from sitting in them are preferred.
- To restrain a guinea pig, place one hand over the shoulder area with the thumb and forefingers directly behind the front legs. The other palm is placed under the hindquarters to support their weight. For more control, the fingers of the hand supporting the hind quarters should grasp and restrain the hind legs.
- Minimum cage/pen sizes are specified in the USDA Animal Welfare Regulations and The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. Exceptions must be approved by the IACUC.
- 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).