

Burgess[™]
SINCE 1790
Excel



THE FIVE GUINEA PIG
WELFARE NEEDS

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BURGESS PET CARE

A BRITISH FAMILY COMPANY, CARING FOR ANIMALS FOR GENERATIONS

We're a proud, independent, family-owned business based in the heart of Yorkshire, with roots in farming and animal care stretching back over 300 years. Today, we combine that heritage with nutritional science to create high-quality food that helps pets live happy and healthy lives.

Every recipe we make is developed by our in-house experts, including vets and nutritionists, so you can trust that what's in the bowl is carefully balanced and backed by science.

Our Burgess Excel range has been supporting small animal health since 1998, when we pioneered the first single-component extruded nugget for rabbits to help prevent selective feeding. We've championed nuggets over muesli ever since because better nutrition means better welfare.



GUINEA PIG AWARENESS WEEK

Education is just as important as nutrition and that's why we launched Guinea Pig Awareness Week.

GPAW is a nationwide welfare campaign designed to help owners better understand guinea pigs' five welfare needs. Every year, thousands of guinea pig owners, vets, retailers and charities come together to share advice, raise awareness and champion better guinea pig care.

Throughout the campaign you'll find:

- Free guinea pig care guides
- Downloadable education packs
- Posters and social content
- Fun activities for families
- Expert-led welfare advice

And the support doesn't stop when the week ends. Our resources are available all year round, helping owners make informed choices and give their guinea pigs the happy, healthy lives they deserve.

Scan to explore, download and get involved:



THE FIVE GUINEA PIG WELFARE NEEDS

WELCOME TO EXCEL'S GUIDE TO CARING FOR YOUR GUINEA PIGS.

Please read through this guide and keep it handy for reference.

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INTRODUCTION TO GUINEA PIGS



GUINEA PIG FACT FILE



LIFE EXPECTANCY: 4-8 YEARS

GUINEA PIG NAMES:

MALE: BOAR, **FEMALE:** SOW, **YOUNG:** PUPS

ORDER: RODENTIA

FAMILY: CAVIIDAE

SCIENTIFIC NAME: CAVIA PORCELLUS

DIET CATEGORY: HERBIVORES

DID YOU KNOW?

Guinea pigs are born fully formed, with their fur and can run around at just a few hours old. They are born ready!

FUN FACT!

Guinea Pigs have four toes on their front feet, but only three on their back feet!



DID YOU KNOW?

Guinea Pigs originate from South America and are thought to have been domesticated and brought to Europe in the 16th Century.

DID YOU KNOW?

Guinea pigs teeth never stop growing! Their teeth are open rooted and will grow throughout their life, meaning they need lots of hay to help keep them healthy and prevent overgrowth.

DID YOU KNOW?

Guinea pigs are very social animals and are happiest when living with other guinea pig friends.

FUN FACT!

Guinea pigs are not pigs; they are part of the Rodent family.

DID YOU KNOW?

Just like humans, guinea pigs cannot synthesise vitamin C themselves, so require supplements within their diet.

FUN FACT!

When guinea pigs are excited, they may jump straight up and down, often turning 90 degrees in mid-air. This slick little move is known as 'pop-corning'.



FUN FACT!

The longest-lived guinea pig was Snowball from Nottinghamshire, UK. She passed away on the 14th February 1979 at the age of 14 years and 10 months, earning a place in the Guinness Book of Records.

THE FIVE WELFARE NEEDS:

Guinea pigs may be small, but their needs are not. They rely on us to provide the right care, environment and companionship to help them live happy, healthy lives. Every guinea pig deserves five essential welfare needs to be met every day.



Guinea pigs need a spacious, secure home with good ventilation and protection from weather. They should have constant access to a larger exercise area, with hiding spaces where they can feel safe. Clean, dry bedding and regular cleaning are essential for their comfort and health.



Guinea pigs require a high-fibre diet based on good-quality feeding hay, supported by a balanced nugget and fresh greens. They cannot make their own vitamin C, so their diet must provide a reliable source every day. Fresh water should always be available.



Guinea pigs are active and curious. They need space to run, explore and forage. Tunnels, hideaways and enrichment help prevent boredom and encourage natural behaviours such as grazing and burrowing.



Guinea pigs should be protected from pain, injury and disease. Regular health checks, prompt veterinary care and daily observation help identify problems early. Clean housing and correct nutrition play an important role in supporting long-term wellbeing.



Guinea pigs are highly social animals and should not live alone. They thrive when housed in compatible pairs or small groups, allowing them to communicate, groom and rest together. Living with other guinea pigs helps reduce stress and supports emotional wellbeing.

GETTING GUINEA PIGS

WHERE TO GET YOUR GUINEA PIGS

There are several options when it comes to buying guinea pigs, including rescue centres, breeders, and pet shops. Each has its advantages, but it is essential to do thorough research before making a decision. Ensure that the establishment is a reputable and registered charity or breeder.



THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Guinea pigs are social animals and should always be kept in bonded pairs or groups.
- Guinea pigs have complex needs and require specialised care.
- Guinea pigs can live up to 8 years, sometimes longer and are not a short term easy pet.
- Who will look after the guinea pigs when you are unable to, during holidays for example.

PREPARING TO BRING GUINEA PIGS HOME

Before welcoming your new guinea pigs home, make sure you have all the essentials that they need. If in doubt speak to a veterinary professional or a reputable charity.

You will also need to register your new guinea pigs with an exotic vet and look into pet insurance.

SHOPPING LIST

- ☐ Excel Feeding Hay
- ☐ Excel Guinea Pig Nuggets
- ☐ Suitable bedding
- ☐ Litter tray
- ☐ Suitable housing
- ☐ Toys and enrichment
- ☐ Water bottle and bowl
- ☐ Food bowl
- ☐ Pet carrier
- ☐ Grooming kit
- ☐ Tasty hay based treats

NUTRITION

Guinea pigs are strict herbivores and naturally spend much of their time grazing on grasses and plants. They require a high-fibre diet to maintain healthy digestion. Ideally, their diet should consist of 85–90% good-quality hay and fresh grass, 5% fresh greens, 5% guinea pig nuggets, plus unlimited fresh water. Follow the Excel 5 Step Feeding Plan on page 9 to help ensure a balanced diet.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FIBRE

A guinea pig's diet should consist of **85–90% feeding hay and fresh grass**. This part of the diet provides the **largest portion of fibre**, which is crucial for their digestive and dental health.

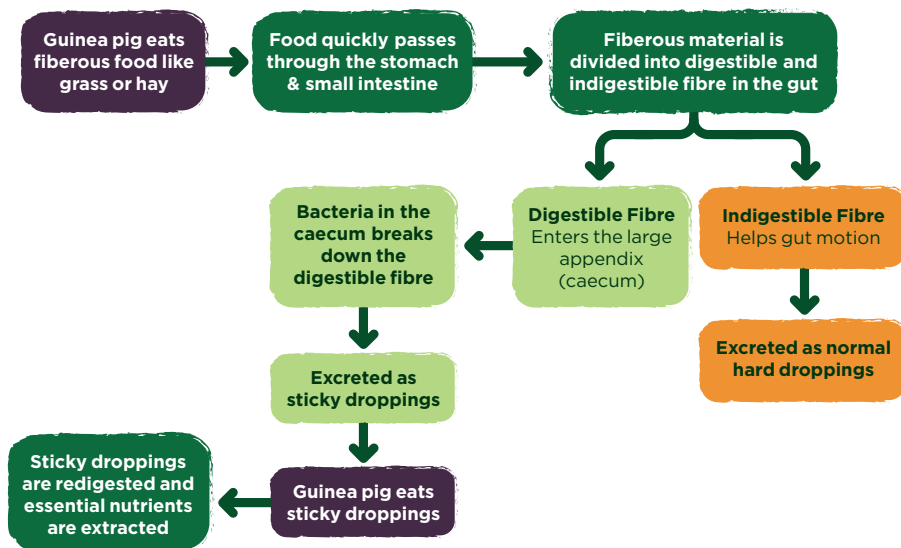
Fibre is divided into two types:

1. Indigestible fibre

- Passes through the digestive system largely unchanged
- Keeps the gut moving
- Stimulates appetite

2. Digestible fibre

- Fermented in the caecum by beneficial bacteria
- Broken down into nutrients that are reabsorbed when guinea pigs eat their **caecotrophs**



Both types are essential to maintain healthy digestion, prevent gut stasis, and ensure overall wellbeing. Without the correct balance of fibre, guinea pigs can develop serious health problems.

NUTRITION

VITAMIN C

Guinea pigs cannot produce vitamin C and must obtain it from their diet. It is vital for collagen production, immune function, and overall health. Species-specific nuggets, such as Burgess Excel Guinea Pig nuggets, provide protected vitamin C to meet their needs, and it is also found in fresh fruits and vegetables. A deficiency can cause scurvy, leading to joint pain, dental problems, and reduced immunity (see page 22).

SELECTIVE FEEDING & MUESLI STYLE DIETS

Muesli-style diets can encourage selective feeding, where guinea pigs eat only their favourite, tastier pieces and leave the high-fibre components, leading to nutritional imbalance.

To prevent selective feeding, offer a small daily portion of high-fibre, good-quality nuggets alongside good quality feeding hay instead of a muesli mix.



TRANSITIONING FROM MUESLI TO NUGGETS

If your guinea pigs are currently fed a muesli-style diet, transition them gradually to nuggets to avoid upsetting their sensitive digestive systems.



BEFORE



WEEK 1



WEEK 2



WEEK 3



WEEK 4

DON'T FORGET THE HAY!

THE EXCEL FEEDING PLAN

92%

of vets
recommend
Excel*

The ^{Burgess}Excel feeding plan

Burgess Excel is the first range to offer a complete feeding plan which provides all the essential fibre, nutrients, vitamins and minerals that guinea pigs need.

Health and happiness in five simple steps and all 100% natural.

FEEDING HAY



EXCEL NUGGETS



NATURE SNACKS



FRESH GREENS



FRESH WATER



The complete diet for guinea pigs

Step 1 EXCEL FEEDING HAY

Hay is vital for dental health (vets say on average 41-60% of guinea pigs have seen evidence of dental disease)*. We grow our hay in the heart of Yorkshire where it is barn dried and dust extracted to deliver the sweet smell and green colour which is characteristic of the best quality hay.



THE EXCEL FEEDING PLAN

Step 2

EXCEL TASTY NUGGETS

Nuggets prevent selective feeding and help maintain digestive health, with prebiotics and an ideal blend of fibre. Research has shown that muesli-style foods lead to selective feeding. This can result in an unbalanced diet.



Step 3

EXCEL NATURE SNACKS

Snacks provide additional nourishment and promote emotional health by encouraging foraging. They're ideal for mixing through Excel Feeding Hay.



Step 4 & 5

FRESH GREENS & FRESH WATER

Feed a range of fresh greens to add variety.
Ensure fresh water is always available.

DAILY

Aim to feed 5-6 greens a day. Mix and match – remember the bulk of the diet should be hay/grass!



TOXIC

If you suspect your guinea pig has eaten a toxic plant, seek veterinary advice immediately.



THE EXCEL RANGE

HAY

ALL OUR HAY PRODUCTS ARE 100% NATURAL AND DUST EXTRACTED

EXCEL FEEDING HAY WITH DANDELION AND MARIGOLD

Luscious timothy hay sprinkled with tasty dandelion and marigold petals to encourage natural foraging behaviour and help to prevent boredom.

Available in a 1kg bag.



BURGESS EXCEL HEDGEROW HERBS FEEDING HAY

Fresh, fragrant, fibre-rich hay to keep teeth trim, tummies happy and boredom at bay. This feeding hay is packed with hedgerow herbs, including nettle, to support urinary health—perfect daily forage. Available in 2.7kg bag.



EXCEL HAY BOX

Our hay boxes are suitable for rabbits, guinea pigs & chinchillas and are made with 100% natural ingredients, packaged in a fully recyclable box. Dust has been extracted to help support your pet's respiratory health, and our hay is high in Beneficial fibre, which aids with digestion. Available in Meadow Hay or Timothy Hay.



BEDDING

EXCEL NAP AND NEST PAPER BEDDING

The Excel Nap & Nest is great for use as bedding and litter for your small animals. Our bedding is made from unused offcuts from the teabag production industry, which makes it super absorbent and soft on little paws.

Designed for use as litter and bedding, it's suitable for rabbits, guinea pigs, hamsters, and small animals.



NUGGETS

EXCEL GUINEA PIG NUGGETS

Our nuggets are high in beneficial fibre and protected vitamin C and come in two delicious flavours Mint and Blackcurrant & Oregano. Our nugget range also support life stage and lifestyle differences, with our Mature and Indoor Guinea Pig Nuggets. Nuggets are an important supplement to hay to ensure your Guinea pigs are getting the vitamins and minerals that they need, they also prevent selective feeding.

Available in a variety of pack sizes from 1.5kg-10kg.



NATURE SNACKS

OUR BRAND-NEW RANGE OF NATURE SNACKS HAS BEEN DEVELOPED WITH ANIMAL NUTRITIONISTS TO MAKE SURE THAT NOT ONLY ARE THEY DELICIOUS FOR YOUR PIGGIES BUT HEALTHY TOO!

EXCEL MEADOW MUNCHIES

Our Meadow Munchies are compressed rolls of tasty meadow hay with added dandelion and camomile for extra taste. Your guinea pigs will have endless fun gnawing and foraging which is good for dental and emotional health.



EXCEL FORAGE AND FEAST HAY BAR

Our hay bars are high in fibre and perfect for hand feeding. These tasty hay bars are topped with delicious flowers - Rose, Cornflower and Marigold.



THE EXCEL RANGE

EXCEL BAKED TREATS

Baked with love, these irresistible heart-shaped treats are made from natural ingredients and are high in fibre. They are perfect for hand feeding which will help you bond with your guinea pigs and they're in a handy resealable pack to keep them fresh.

Available in three tempting flavours:

Fruity Feasts with Banana and Blueberry

Herby Hearts with Apple and Mixed Herbs

Veg Patch Bites with Root Vegetables



EXCEL FORAGE

Lovingly made, our delicious forage mixes are a healthy treat and are ideal for sprinkling on hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour. Luscious Leaves are made with a tempting mix of dandelion leaves, nettle leaves, red clover and ribwort and our Wildflower Forage are made with a tempting mix of rose, hibiscus, marigold & cornflower.



EXCEL FORAGE AND FEAST MINI BALES

Our Excel Forage & Feast Mini Bales are perfect for your guinea pigs. Available in four tasty options, Cornflower, Rosehip, Marigold & Chamomile they are made with natural ingredients and is great for encouraging natural foraging.



EXCEL BOTANICAL BLENDS HEDGEROW HERBS

Burgess Excel Botanical Blends Hedgerow Herbs, is a complementary food for rabbits, guinea pigs and chinchillas. Made with a delicious mix of Nettle leaf, Dandelion leaf, Marigold flower, Burdock root Cleavers. Sprinkle a small handful of Botanical Blends, through Burgess Excel Feeding Hay to encourage natural foraging behaviour and, it comes in a handy tub perfect to reuse for storage of nuggets, hay or more forage! Feed in moderation.



ENVIRONMENT

CREATING THE RIGHT HOME

Guinea pigs are active for much of the day and need more than a small hutch. Their housing should be viewed as a cosy bedroom, permanently attached to a much larger exercise area where they can roam, explore and feel safe.

As a guide, the sleeping area should be at least 5ft x 2ft, with constant access to a spacious run. The more room you can provide, the better.

A SAFE & COMFORTABLE SPACE

Their home should be:

- Draught-free
- Well ventilated
- Predator-proof
- Filled with soft bedding hay or animal-safe paper bedding

Provide plenty of hiding places such as tunnels, pipes or nest boxes. As prey animals, guinea pigs feel safest when they can quickly retreat and hide. Sleeping and toilet areas should be separate, using paper-based, non-expanding litter where possible.





OUTDOOR LIVING

Guinea pigs can live outdoors, but their housing must protect them from extreme weather. In hot weather, keep them shaded and out of direct sunlight. In cold or very wet conditions, move them into a sheltered area such as a shed, porch or utility space.

Use strong mesh and secure bolts to protect against predators. Keep them away from areas treated with garden chemicals, which can be harmful.

Because guinea pigs are small and close to the ground, they can chill quickly, warmth and dry bedding are especially important in winter.

INDOOR LIVING

Guinea pigs can also thrive indoors in a large enclosure or dedicated area.

Ensure:

- Cables are covered
- Unsafe plants are removed
- Flooring is non-slip
- The space is well ventilated

Keep their enclosure away from radiators and very warm areas. The ideal temperature range is around 17–20°C.

Provide hideaways, tunnels and constant access to hay to encourage natural behaviour.



COMPANIONSHIP & BONDING

BETTER IN PAIRS

Guinea pigs are highly social animals and should not live alone. They thrive in compatible same-sex pairs or small groups. If keeping a male and female together, the male should be neutered to prevent unwanted litters.

NOT WITH OTHER SPECIES

Guinea pigs are happiest with other guinea pigs and should not be with other species.



BUILDING A BOND WITH YOU

Guinea pigs can form lovely relationships with their owners, but trust takes time. When they first arrive, allow them to settle in quietly. Speak softly, move slowly and avoid sudden movements. Sit near them while they explore so they become used to your presence. Offer food gently from your hand and let them approach you in their own time.



HANDLING

Approach at their level rather than from above. Let them sniff your hand before gently placing one hand around the shoulders and supporting their body underneath. Always support their weight fully and hold them close to your chest or on your lap so they feel secure.

HOUSE KEEPING

It's important that your guinea pigs enclosure is clean and all 5 of their welfare needs are met at all times.

DAILY TASKS

- Clean and replenish litter tray and hay
- Removed soiled bedding material
- Wash and replenish water bowl/bottle
- Wash food containers
- Remove any uneaten food items
- Carry out a top to tail health check including grooming if necessary

WEEKLY TASKS

- Remove all items from the environment and clean thoroughly
- Clean the housing with an animal safe disinfectant and allow to dry
- Remove and replace all bedding materials. Keep a small amount of old, but unsoiled bedding material to maintain a familiar smell.

TOP TO TOE HEALTH CHECK

Daily health checks help you understand what's normal for your guinea pigs, supporting their wellbeing and enabling you to spot potential health issues early. Take care when handling your guinea pigs, and place them onto a non-slip surface, ensuring they are safe during their health check.



NOSE

Ensure the nose is clean and clear, with no discharge.

EYES

Ensure the eyes are bright and clear, with no signs of weeping.

EARS

Ensure the ears are clear with no signs of discharge or mites.

FUR

Inspect your guinea pigs coat, it should be clean, free of bald spots and tangles. Part the fur to ensure the skin is healthy and flake free.



FEET

Check your guinea pigs foot pads, look for any redness, sores or wounds.

NAILS

Ensure your guinea pigs nails are not overgrown or curling into their feet.

BODY

lightly feel down your guinea pigs, ensure there is no lumps or bumps, or any signs of pain when being touched.

BOTTOM

Ensure your guinea pigs bottom is clean, dry and free from any stuck droppings. This is even more crucial in summer months to prevent flystrike (see page 23).

BEHAVIOUR

As much as physical health is important, behaviour is also essential. Ensure your guinea pigs are performing their natural behaviours and eating normally. If you are concerned about your guinea pig's health or behaviour, contact your exotic vet for advice.

BEHAVIOUR

THEY LOVE TO TALK

Guinea pigs are surprisingly vocal. “Wheek-wheek” often means excitement (especially at feeding time!). Soft “purring” sounds usually signal contentment. Short “putt-putt” noises are often heard while exploring. Listening to their sounds helps you understand how they’re feeling.



NATURAL FORAGERS

Guinea pigs are natural grazers and love to forage. Hiding nuggets or scattering hay encourages natural behaviour and keeps them mentally stimulated. Foraging helps prevent boredom and supports wellbeing.

ACTIVE & ALERT

Although small, guinea pigs are active for much of the day and night.

They need:

- Space to run in short bursts
- Tunnels and hideaways
- Constant access to hay
- Companionship

As prey animals, they feel safest when shelter is always nearby.

SCENT & FAMILIARITY

Guinea pigs scent mark by rubbing their chin or body on objects.

Familiar smells help them feel secure. When cleaning their enclosure, leaving a small amount of used bedding behind can help reduce stress by maintaining a familiar scent.



DISEASE & PROTECTION

A healthy guinea pig is alert, chatty, has bright eyes, and a shiny coat. Knowing their normal appearance and behaviour makes it easier to spot subtle changes in appetite or activity that may indicate a problem. Early detection is key. Daily health checks and 6 monthly veterinary health checks will help to support your guinea pigs health and detect any concerns early.

COMMON AILMENTS

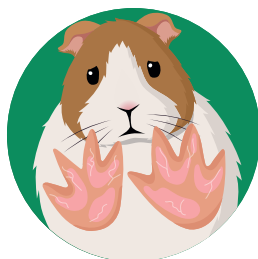
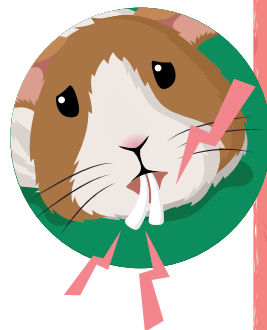
DENTAL DISEASE

Guinea pigs have open-rooted teeth that grow continuously throughout their lives. Eating plenty of hay and grass helps wear their teeth down naturally.

Inadequate nutrition can lead to dental problems, which may cause pain, eating difficulties, and additional health issues.

Dental problems include:

- **Misaligned incisors** – front teeth which can become so long that they become embedded in their nose, lips and tongues.
- **Overgrown molars** – cheek teeth that wear unevenly and develop sharp spurs that can lacerate the tongue and cheek, or even trap the tongue.
- **Malocclusion** – malocclusion occurs when teeth overlap and do not align properly. It can be inherited or develop at any stage of a guinea pig's life. Misaligned teeth fail to wear naturally, leading to overgrowth and potential dental complications.



PODODERMATITIS

In the wild, guinea pigs live on soft grass and rarely encounter hard surfaces. In domestic environments, hard or wire flooring can cause swollen paws and pressure sores on the bottoms of their feet, which is known as Pododermatitis or Bumblefoot. If untreated, the infection can spread to bones, causing serious health issues. Protect your guinea pigs' feet by covering cage floors with soft bedding materials and avoiding hard surfaces when letting them out to explore.

EYE PROBLEMS

Problems with the eyes is the most common reason guinea pigs are taken to the vets in the UK. Symptoms of problems with the eyes may include redness, weeping eyes, eye discharge, or cloudy eyes. There are many different causes of eye problems, and if you are concerned about your guinea pigs' eyes, seek veterinary advice.

LUMPS AND BUMPS

All animals can develop tumours, but guinea pigs are especially prone to skin and mammary tumours. Any lump should be checked by a vet. Most are harmless and can be removed with simple surgery, but if needed, the vet may run further tests.

DISEASE & PROTECTION



SCURVY

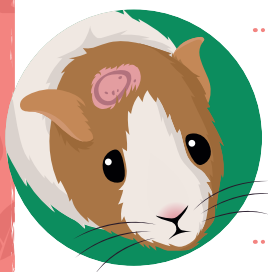
Although not very common anymore, Scurvy occurs due to a vitamin C deficiency. Without it, guinea pigs become vulnerable to illness, similar to sailors in the past who lacked fresh fruits and vegetables. Even with an adequate diet, some guinea pigs may develop a deficiency if illness or other health issues reduce their intake or absorption of vitamin C. If your guinea pig shows symptoms of scurvy, consult a vet immediately.

Symptoms of Scurvy:

- Weak and lacking in energy
- Difficulty in walking due to swollen joints
- Spots or subcutaneous bleeding just under the surface of the skin
- Small wounds that bleed excessively or don't heal as rapidly as usual
- Poor skin and fur condition
- Discharge from the eyes and/or nose
- Loss of appetite and weight loss
- Teeth grinding
- Diarrhoea

PARASITES

Guinea pigs can get fleas, lice, and mites, which cause itching, hair loss, and sore patches. Treatment requires a vet-prescribed medication for affected guinea pigs, as well as cleaning their accommodation, toys, and bedding. Persistent scratching can lead to skin infections, which may need further veterinary treatment.



RINGWORM

Symptoms include hair loss, crusty skin lesions, and excessive itching, often around the head, face, and ears, but sometimes spreading to the back and legs. Your vet can treat fungal infections with a prescribed course of anti-fungal medication.

COLDS

Colds are common in guinea pigs and are often caused by draughts, damp conditions, or temperature changes. Although mild at first, a cold can quickly develop into pneumonia, which needs urgent veterinary treatment with antibiotics. Keep guinea pigs in a draught-free area, change bedding regularly to prevent dampness, and never house them outdoors during winter.



GASTROINTESTINAL (GI) STASIS

GI stasis is a common condition in guinea pigs. As their digestive system is specialised to process a high-fibre diet, even small dietary or digestive changes can cause serious problems. These changes can stop normal stomach and intestinal contractions, preventing food from moving through or being properly digested and absorbed.

It has many possible causes. A reduced or halted food intake can trigger stasis; however, this reduced intake maybe due to several other health issues including dental disease, pain, stress, infection, chronic illness, certain medications, obstruction, limited water intake or environmental changes.

Early signs of GI stasis include, but are not limited to: loss of appetite, lethargy, bloating, reduced, or halted faecal output and inactivity. If you notice any of these signs, contact your vet as a matter of urgency.



FLYSTRIKE

Flystrike is a potentially fatal condition in which flies lay eggs around a guinea pig's bottom. The eggs hatch into maggots that feed on the flesh, and in summer this can happen within hours. Check guinea pigs at least twice daily. If you suspect flystrike, contact a vet immediately for treatment, including clipping fur, removing maggots, and giving antibiotics.

URINARY TRACT PROBLEMS

Guinea pigs are prone to developing stones in their bladder, kidneys or ureters, tubes connecting the kidneys and bladder. They can also develop urinary tract infections. This is more common in female guinea pigs. It is believed that many urinary tract problems in guinea pigs may be stress related. Signs to watch out for include blood in the urine, straining to urinate and loss of appetite. If you notice any of these signs or issues with your guinea pigs' urination, take them to the vet as soon as possible.

OBESITY

Guinea pigs need plenty of exercise or they can quickly become obese. Prevention is the best solution for obesity related illnesses. Keep your guinea pigs at a suitable weight by feeding them according to the feeding guides to prevent overeating.



GROOMING

Regular grooming is essential for guinea pigs to maintain optimum health, prevent matting and ensure comfort and cleanliness. Frequency and grooming techniques will vary depending on age and breed. Long-haired breeds will need grooming every day. If your guinea pigs change their grooming habits, consult your vet, as they may be ill.

Burgess[™] THE *Excel* FEEDING PLAN

92% OF VETS RECOMMEND EXCEL*



**FEEDING
HAY**



**EXCEL
NUGGETS**



**NATURE
SNACKS**



**FRESH
GREENS**



**FRESH
WATER**

Big care for small animals

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*Annual survey of UK vets