

# Care Cards

## Chinchillas



Chinchillas are rodents that share many anatomic and physiologic characteristics. Chinchillas are small, gentle, and lively animals that make good pets because they are docile and relatively easy to care for. Chinchillas require daily dust baths but guinea pigs do not.

Chinchillas are quiet, shy animals, but are agile and enjoy climbing and jumping. Because of this, they require a large cage for captivity. The proper substrate for your chinchilla is a pulp-type bedding, avoid all wood based products (cedar, pine shavings). Chinchillas do best in a dry environment at relatively cool temperatures. I recommend a cage temperature between fifty and sixty-eight degrees Fahrenheit. Good ventilation is important to help prevent respiratory disease. Chinchillas do not tolerate dampness and may develop hyperthermia at temperatures over eighty degrees Fahrenheit.

The daily diet for your chinchilla should be 50% pelleted diet, 25% hay, 25% fresh fruits and vegetables. I like to feed hard fruits and vegetables, like apples, carrots, broccoli, and kale. **Avoid any pelleted diet that has seeds mixed in**, the seed hulls can become trapped in the GI tract and require surgery to remove.

Flight is the major defense mechanism of the chinchilla, and they rarely bite. Frequent dust baths are necessary to maintain a healthy fur coat. Sanitized chinchilla dust is available at most pet stores. Approximately one inch of the dust should be placed in a pan big enough for the pet to roll around in. They may spend up to an hour dusting. The pan should be removed daily after its use to help prevent fecal contamination.

The average life span is ten years, although some chinchillas have reached twenty years of age. The females weigh more than the males, reaching 400-600 grams compared to 400-500 grams for the males. Their normal body temperature ranges from 98-100 degrees Fahrenheit. Chinchillas reach sexual maturity at eight months old. Their normal estrus cycle is 30-50 days. If the female is not bred during estrus, she will repeat the cycle in 40 days. Normal breeding season is November to May. The normal gestation is 105 to 118 days with the average being 111 days. Litter sizes range from one to six with two being the average. The young are born fully furred, with teeth and open eyes. They usually begin walking one hour after birth. Unlike most animals, the mom stands during nursing. The young will start eating solid food at one week and are weaned between six and eight weeks of age.

