

Chinchilla need list:

1. Living cage
2. Water bottle
3. Chewing toys
4. Bath container
5. Hide-out space

Chinchilla Daily & Food:

1. Fresh water
2. Timothy hay
3. Pellet food
4. Bath dust
5. Shaving Pine
6. Alfalfa hay cubes (chewing use)
7. Small amount snacks like oatmeal, dry apple wood etc.

HABITAT

When looking for a location to place your animals, follow these guidelines:

- Away from dampness
- Not too close to heat source
- Not near drafty areas
- Protected from outside intruders
- Out of direct sunlight
- Plenty of air circulation without blowing directly on them
- In an open cage with plenty of air circulation



-Temperatures not exceeding 75 degrees in the summer and not dropping below 50 degrees in the winter. They may need to be kept warmer than the minimum in the winter if they are on wire bottom cages and expecting babies, and cooler in the summer if the humidity is high.

Animals like a nice, clean cage and good breathable air. Although many owners prefer a very large cage, it is not necessary. Chinchillas don't require a lot of exercise.

Guidelines have been established for minimum cage size:

- 2200 cubic inches for breeders
- 1500 cubic inches for single animals
- One square foot of floor space or 8 cubic feet of room space per animal
- 3000 animals in a 38 X 80 room with an 8' ceiling (38'x30'x8')

This allows for adequate exercise and yet allows for a number of animals in a smaller space. The number of animals in your chin area should be kept to a number that will allow enough room for proper maintenance and management as well as fresh air.

Larger cages are fine, but be sure that the cages are safe for chinchillas. Ramps should be made of a solid material, as it is easy for small feet to get caught in wire ramps. In fact, ramps aren't necessary at all, as chinchillas are excellent jumpers and can get from one level to another with no problem. Since chinchillas chew, cages need to be made of wire, or a material that is safe for chewing. Be aware that if you make a cage out of wood, it will get chewed!

For breeding animals, cage wire should be no larger than 1/2" x 1" and preferably galvanized after welding to prevent rusting. One inch square wire is too large and babies can escape. This size wire may be used once the animal is weaned, if it cannot get its head through the wire.

Two types of cages are typical for chinchillas: wire bottom or solid bottom. Cages with wire bottoms should contain a piece of soft wood (like pine) placed on the floor for them to stand on.

If you are using wire bottom cages that are stacked, about 5" should be allowed between them for ease in placing clean newspapers to catch their droppings. If solid bottom cages are used, they may be stacked directly on top of each other. These require pine or aspen (not cedar) wood shavings to be placed within the cage. The animals will sit directly on them.

Chinchillas should be kept in an area separate from any other livestock so that diseases are not transmitted.

FEED/WATER

Since chinchillas are rodents, their teeth are continually growing. They need something to gnaw on to prevent their teeth from growing too long. A pine board, wooden toys, or a pumice stone should be kept in their cage for this purpose.

Chinchillas need fresh water daily. DO NOT USE distilled water on your animals. The nutrients which have been removed are important in maintaining a healthy animal.

There are many varieties of food available to your chinchilla. Whatever form you choose; try to keep your supply as fresh and consistent as possible. Feed should include only pellets, not treats. Large amounts of food are not required. You may feed either once or twice a day, but be consistent.

Shelf life is extremely important. Most chinchilla food only retains its vitamins and nutrients for about 6 months. Certain nutrients begin deteriorating immediately after milling. Contrary to what was previously thought, freezing the pellets does not increase its shelf life.

If you choose to change your feed, gradually introduce your animal to the new feed for a couple of weeks by increasing the percentage of new to old.

If you travel with your chinchilla and he seems to suddenly decide he doesn't want to eat or drink water, try getting him to return to his normal routine by feeding him a couple of salted sunflower seeds. This will make him thirsty and will help him begin eating and drinking regularly again.

Storage of food is as important as its quality. It should be stored in a cool, dry place in covered containers that will keep it from becoming contaminated. Metal containers may draw moisture and cause mold. Direct contact with a cement floor may also increase the chance of molding.

Fresh, mold-free alfalfa or timothy hay, either loose hay or hay cubes, are the only other necessity in the care of your animals. Some people like the fresh hay because the animals like to play with it and it gives them something to chew on. It has also reportedly given them a nicer coat. If you use hay cubes, try to get the most compact type. If the bales are too loose, they will break up easily and most will be lost, especially if you are using a wire bottomed cage.

To insure that their animals are getting all the vitamins and nutrients that are required, some ranchers feed an optional vitamin supplement. Many varieties of this are handmade and fed.

Supplementing takes the place of feeding "treats" which may be potentially harmful. Raisins, which chinchillas love, are high in sugar content and may cause teeth and intestinal problems or they may become overweight if fed in too large a quantity. A better treat would be to feed them something like a Wheat Chex or Shredded Wheat (no frosting) that is lower in sugar and a grain-based product.

Pellets and hay are the only foods that are necessary for your chinchillas. These animals thrive on a simple, consistent diet. Feeding your chinchillas a lot of treats can cause many health problems.

Toys in the cage are not necessary, but if you chose to give your chinchillas toys, be sure that they are safe to use. Wheels should be large enough that the chinchilla does not have to run in an unnatural position, have a smooth running surface and contain no crossbars. Watch chins that use wheels, as some will become obsessed and have a hard time maintaining their body weight. Toys must be made with safe woods and other materials that are not harmful when ingested. Do not put chinchillas in the plastic balls used for hamsters, as chinchillas overheat easily.

Since chinchillas like to hide, it is not a bad idea to give them somewhere in their cage to do so. A large coffee can or small glass goldfish tank will work. You can also build wooden houses for them.

Some owners give their chinchillas “run time”. Chinchillas are very curious animals and feel the need to investigate everything, including chair legs, electrical wires, etc. If you allow your animal to run loose, do so in a confined area that has been cleared of electric cords and anything else that would be harmful. Keep an eye on the animals at all times. Too much exercise can cause the animals to lose body weight, inhibiting breeding.

Last, but certainly not least, is a chinchilla’s bath. Unlike humans, chinchillas do not use water in their bath. Since they originally came from dry, desert-like areas where there is basically no water, they prefer dust baths. This bath is referred to as “dusting” or “sanding”. The animal’s extremely fine, dense fur can get very greasy from a natural oil called lanolin whose purpose is to keep it from matting. Dampness can accentuate this oil and cause the animals to look wet on very humid days. Sweat from your hands can also bring these oils to the surface of the fur and make it look greasy. Dusting cleans and fluffs the fur making the animal much more comfortable as well as nicer to look at.

Dust baths may be offered anywhere from once or twice a week to once a day. No set time is required although if left in the cage, they may think it is a bathroom! You will notice that generally when the bath is offered to them, they will immediately jump in to clean themselves. Within a few minutes they will be thoroughly clean and after that it is just used to play in. Your schedule will dictate the time allotted, but make sure the animal’s fur is dry and looks smooth when it is finished. Try to establish a set time for their bath, as chinchillas like consistency.

HANDLING YOUR CHINCHILLA

Your chinchilla is a quick little animal that is easily frightened. If he has been startled before you open his cage, he may dart from corner to corner. Slowly reach into the cage with one hand and follow the animal around until you can firmly grasp the tail near the base. Yes, the tail! This is an acceptable and proper way to pick up a chinchilla. As you catch his tail, position your other hand under his body, particularly his strong hind legs, and remove him from the cage in an upside-down position. Take care that you do not lose him because he is extremely strong and can jump a great distance. An unexpected fall can cause a broken bone or internal injury.

If your animal is calm or tamed and has not been previously startled, you may be able to reach into the cage and pick up the animal with both hands in a scooping motion. As your animal gets used to being handled more, this will become easier and easier. NEVER catch your chinchilla by his back or his neck. This may cause possible injury and fur loss. Do not squeeze him around his ribs since they have a floating rib cage and this can cause internal injuries.

Occasionally a chinchilla may bite. He is not normally a mean animal but, if frightened or overly excited, he may try to bite. Sometimes, their nibbles of curiosity may become a little harder than you care for. If a chinchilla’s bite breaks the skin, it is not cause for alarm. Rinse it and care for it in the same manner you would normally care for a scrape.

Like any animal, surroundings without loud noises are best. A steady flow of music will help neutralize most noises and create a greater degree of uniformity to their environment.

If your animal gets loose and you are having trouble catching it, a fish net or live trap works well. When you are unable to find where he has disappeared to, look in the darkest, most remote corner. He will probably be there.

CHINCHILLA HEALTH

Normally, the chinchilla is a very healthy, hearty animal. Under reasonable conditions they will thrive and reproduce. With a well-balanced diet, clean environment, and proper handling, there should be no need of additional shots or medications. Over-handling, too many extra goodies and too many changes in their routine can break down the animal's health.

Chinchillas seem to contract very few diseases; prevention is the best deterrent. Cleanliness in your housing area is probably the best prevention method available. A good product to use in your clean-up is Environ. Brushing the cages out, cleaning of debris, and soaking in a solution of Environ for 10 minutes is one way to disinfect. Another method is to burn the surface, scrub with a wire brush and wash. When using Environ, let the cages air dry and do not rinse. Feeders and dusters may also be done this way. A sweeping compound of sawdust sprinkled with Environ will also keep bacteria down. Water bottles and stoppers should be sterilized and the water supply kept pure. This is very important!

Most veterinarians are not familiar with chinchillas because of their rarity and the lack of information written about them. If you need them treated by a vet, have them treated with the same dosages as a guinea pig. This is their closest relative and they will respond best to this treatment.

Early diagnosis of a problem by close observation of your animals is the best preventative method. Be constantly on the lookout for variations in the normal looks and sounds of your animals. This can be your quickest indication of a potential problem that might be able to be solved with a minimum of fuss at this point rather than a major problem later. An animal lying flat on its belly in warm weather may not be getting enough ventilation in that area. Biting a water valve and sometimes trying to bite you, not eating properly, dancing around in front of the water supply, sitting hunched up in a corner of the cage, or a sunken stomach may be indications of a stopped-up water supply. Animals with a few tufts of fur out may indicate fighting or breeding. Watery eyes, especially with a little pus, may indicate an eye infection or teeth problems. Bloody feet may indicate an abortion or a recent birth.

An animal that appears to be crying or has watery eyes may have teeth problems. This may be hereditary or may be caused by the jaw being bumped and causing the teeth to go out of alignment. The animal will be unable to properly wear down its teeth and, since the teeth continually grow, will cause a condition called "malocclusion" which is potentially deadly. As the teeth grow, food will not be able to be properly chewed and the animal will eventually die of starvation.

Recently, another problem has been brought to light that appears to have the same symptoms. The animal has watery eyes and begins to dehydrate. Autopsies have shown that a fatty liver causes this. According to one vet, this is a result of an improper diet with too many "goodies".

Smells can help you become alert to humidity problems. Mustiness in the air may indicate mold and not enough air circulation. Water may also be dripping in feed dishes or dusters and creating mold. This is potentially fatal if your animal eats moldy food. Uneaten food may also indicate that the feeder needs to be cleaned of fines or spoiled food.

Sudden changes of temperature may also affect the animals. Extremes of hot or cold will increase their susceptibility to infectious agents and will result in an increase in the severity of the infection.

Normally, one of the first indications of a chinchilla being sick is the appearance of the fur being dry, dull, or rough. If their stomach appears sunken, they are probably dehydrated. Check that the water flow is not plugged. As sickness progresses, their eyes will lose their clear, bright appearance and they will become indifferent to their surroundings.

Another quick indication that something is wrong is made by observing the droppings. These are normally soft but not watery, with no smell. If they become hard and smaller than normal it may indicate constipation. Soft, watery feces indicates diarrhea and intestinal infections.

The normal temperature of a chinchilla is 97 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit when taken from the rectum. Temperature that is low or subnormal is very serious and the animal seldom survives. When a chinchilla has a temperature as low as 94 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit it is usually just a matter of time before the animal is dead. Too high a temperature is also dangerous. Anything over 103 degrees is very serious and steps should be taken to lower it as soon as possible.

Most females mature at about 7 months of age and may be put into breeding at this time. Males should be placed into breeding when they are approximately 7 or 8 months old. Chinchillas should be placed into breeding before they turn 2 years old for optimum ability to breed.

A chinchilla's gestation period is 111 days. A female is capable of breeding back (conceiving) anytime within the first 72 hours after she has littered. If have male chinchilla in the same cage they will breed again; this can absolutely create bad breeding cycle which harms to the chinchilla mom, current babies and potential next generation.

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