

Owning chinchillas is great, fun, and very rewarding, but it is a big responsibility and a long-term commitment.

Did you know chinchillas can live to 15 - 20 years?

Providing for all your chinchilla's needs is the best way of ensuring their physical and mental wellbeing, resulting in a long, healthy life. Here are some guidelines for offering your chinchillas the best care:



Provide a suitable and stimulating living environment



Our housing requirements aim to ensure the best welfare standards for chinchillas. Our team are happy to offer advice in purchasing or adapting your set-up to provide the best home before adopting.

A pair of chinchillas need an enclosure of at least 5ft x 3ft x 2ft (H x W x D) or (152 x 90 x 60cm) with 12-14mm bar spacing (for up to 3 chinchillas).

The enclosure should have plenty of shelves, branches, and boxes inside. Any shelves or platforms should be covered with a suitable substrate such as newspaper, hay, and fleece. They should have lots of places to hide in and jump on.

Remember, chinchillas require a minimum of 1 hour exercise per day outside of their enclosure. The bar spacing is important as chinchillas can manipulate their bodies through small gaps. This risks them escaping or becoming stuck which can cause injury/stress.

Chinchillas require a minimum of 1 hour exercise per day outside of their enclosure. This should be done under supervision in a safe room. Ideally in the same room as their enclosure to keep smells familiar and allow easy safe access to and from their enclosure. Any wires should be covered or removed, any other animals or plants should be removed from the free roaming space.

Chinchillas are nocturnal, so they are active at night and sleep during the day. As a companion animal, they are more suited to adults and older children.

Chinchillas are sensitive to heat, light, damp, and draughts. The enclosure should be situated in a suitable location to prevent health problems. They are prone to heat stroke due to their extremely thick fur. The ideal room temperature for your chinchilla's room should be between 10-15°C.

Clean the house and toilet areas regularly. The base of the enclosure should be lined with newspaper or substrate to collect droppings and urine. You should complete a daily spot clean whereby you sweep up the stray poos and sieve sand baths, as necessary. You should also add in a handful of fresh hay each day.

Your chinchillas' enclosure should be given a thorough deep clean once a week, whereby all items are removed and cleaned with pet safe disinfectant. You can then add in some new enrichment and slightly rearrange the enclosure to keep them stimulated by their environment.





Preserve their health by protecting them from pain, injury, and disease



Check your chinchillas for signs of injury or illness every day and seek veterinary advice if necessary.

Check teeth are not becoming overgrown. Chinchilla's teeth grow continuously throughout their life. The teeth need to be worn down every day by eating hay and chewing on suitable safe enrichment. Failure to eat the right diet will quickly result in serious dental disease. When checking teeth, you will be able to see the front set of incisors easily, their teeth should be meeting at an even level and dark orange in colour. Back teeth will need to be checked by an exotic vet with specialist equipment.

Signs of dental issues:

- Lack of appetite / struggling to chew.
- Teeth becoming lighter in colour.
- Swollen face
- Sweepy eyes
- Drooling
- Misaligned teeth
- Reduced amount of faeces / change in faeces shape and size.
- Matted fur (lack of grooming)



Check body condition:

- **Coat:** Look for signs of bald patches, sores, or lumps. Their fur is so thick they cannot get fleas.
- **Weight:** if fed the incorrect diet, chinchillas can easily become overweight. Following the correct diet is key to maintaining a healthy body composition as this will prevent further health conditions from developing. Please see 'diet' section for more information on feeding amounts and what foods to feed/avoid. A general adult ideal weight can range between 450 -700 grams however this is a rough guide and will depend on many factors.
- **Limbs:** check for mobility, swelling, limps and breaks as these can be caused by their quick and springy natural behaviours causing them to injure their legs.





Provide a nutritious diet and fresh water



Chinchillas are herbivores meaning their diet is plant-based. Their digestive system is designed to digest plant-based matter and not meat products. It is essential that chinchillas are fed the correct diet to stay healthy and avoid excessive weight gain and dental disease.

Their diet should include:

- **80% hay:** the best diet consists almost entirely of good quality hay and dried grass forage, available always. They should mainly consume meadow hay but can also enjoy a small amount of Timothy, alfalfa, and orchard grass.
- **5% complimentary feeds:** this should be in pellet form with balanced nutrients, rather than a muesli mix, to prevent selective feeding. 1 to 2 tbsp of good quality pellets is plenty per chinchilla. The pellet should be of excellent quality with the main ingredient being grass or hay.
- **15 % forage and healthy treats. Examples of this include:**
 - Twigs from pear, apple, hazel, or willow trees should be provided to wear down the teeth.
 - Safe forage such as dried dandelions, dried goji berries and any chinchilla-safe dried herbs.
 - Avoid high sugar treats: chinchillas cannot break down sugars and have sensitive stomachs. Treats like these such as fruits or vegetable e.g. carrot or apple should be fed scarcely – one portion of a 5 pence piece size per week is plenty. Avoid commercial treats which are high in sugars.
 - Healthy commercial bought treats where the main ingredient is hay can be fed 2-3 times a week depending on the size.
- **Fresh water** in a bowl, available always. We do not recommend using water bottles due to them being harder to keep clean and water bowls allowing a more natural way to drink. Please refresh your chinchillas' water bowl daily and fill it right to the very top to help monitor drinking levels. You may need to refresh more regularly as necessary if any poo or bedding gets into the bowl.





Promoting natural behaviours:

A dust bath (using chinchilla dust/ sand) is needed to keep their coats clean and free from grease. Chinchillas only groom themselves when feeling completely relaxed, safe and stress free. Preferably, this should be given 2-3 days a week rather than daily to avoid it becoming a toilet area.

Different heights in their enclosure so wooden shelves hooked on to the sides are ideal. Also, thick branches of willow or hazel make good climbing frames. A bedroom area for snuggling should be made from a sturdy wooden box; if you are using bedding keep this to a minimum inside the box. You should **not** use ladders as they can damage their limbs by getting them caught in these gaps.

Chinchillas will chew plastic. Do not use enrichment made from plastic only use wooden enrichment due to the risk of them digesting the plastic which can lead to pain and injuries internally.

Fast and reactive. Using hanging enrichment such as ropes should be avoided due to chinchillas fast bouncy behaviours as their limbs can become entrapped and injured.

Companionship:

- Chinchillas are sociable animals and need to live in pairs or small groups.
- Ideally, chinchillas should be housed in same sex pairs or a male and female can go together if the male is neutered.
- Please see our chinchilla 'Bonding Guide' for more information on finding the right match for your chinchilla/s and what positive/negative behaviours to look out for.

Fur slipping/Moulting: Chinchillas' coats are very thick and dense. Due to this, they go through a natural moult every 3/4 months. The coat may take on a wavy appearance during this moult due to the new fur growing through. Due to this natural occurrence, you must ensure you are extra careful with handling as if they become startled or are handled too forcefully, this can cause a 'fur slip'. This means they will suddenly release a tuft of their fur to attempt to release their predator's grip. As this is a fear response, it can cause stress however it does not harm them, and the fur should re-grow.

General handling: Care should always be taken when handling chinchillas as they have delicate spines. You must hold them against your chest, making sure feet are supported and not hanging freely. You can use one hand to support the area around the base of the tail to ensure all areas of the body are supported. Never grab them by the tail. Be aware, lots of chinchillas do not like to be handled, therefore, they may try and bite or wriggle.

