

Owning a Pet Chinchilla



General Information

Chinchillas can make fun, enjoyable pets. They are rodents that originate from South America, where they live in the Andes Mountains. Their average life span is about 10 years (9–15).

Chinchillas weigh between 400 and 600 grams with the females being slightly larger than the males. They are nocturnal animals so they are more active at night and sleep during the day.



They are quiet, shy animals that rarely bite. They are also fast, agile, and love to climb and jump. As with any pet, they can occasionally get sick, and their illnesses are often severe. All pet chinchillas should be examined by a qualified veterinarian within 48 hours of adoption and at least annually thereafter.

The vet exam is critical in detecting signs of disease and help new pet owners get off on the right foot. Many problems are caused by misinformation so the first veterinary visit can help prevent well-intentioned owners from doing the wrong thing and ultimately contributing to the pet's early death.



Interesting Information

Like all rodents, chinchilla's teeth grow continuously throughout their life.

They have a digestive tract that is specialized for digesting large amounts of fiber.

Their breeding season is mainly November through May. Babies are born with eyes open, fully furred, and active.

Chinchillas can exhibit “fur slip” which is when they release big clumps of fur. This can happen if they are handled roughly or the fur is grasped too tightly. This is a defense mechanism they have developed to get away from predators.

Chinchillas love daily dust baths (see our handout [Chinchilla Housing](#) for more information).



Signs Of A Healthy Pet Chinchilla

Chinchillas should be bright and alert, and move quickly when startled. Avoid ones with closed eyes or discharge from the eyes or nose. Check the ears for redness or excess wax, which might indicate an infection. If possible, examine the teeth and make sure the incisors (front teeth) are not overgrown. They should feel neither fat nor thin; you should be able to feel the ribs with just a small amount of fat over them. Check the anal area for diarrhea or moistness, which might indicate a gastrointestinal infection.

The First Veterinary Visit

Your chinchilla should come with a health guarantee that requires a checkup by a veterinarian within a few days, usually 48 hours after purchase. Select a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about chinchillas.

The first visit will include determining the animal's weight, as well as a thorough physical examination checking for any abnormalities. The animal is examined for signs of dehydration and malnutrition. A fecal test is done to check for internal parasites. Your veterinarian may suggest blood tests. The veterinarian can also determine the sex of your chinchilla. Like all pets, chinchillas should be examined yearly and should have their feces tested for intestinal parasites during the annual visit.

Vaccinations

Pet chinchillas do not require vaccinations.