GUIDE TO GUINEA PIG MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Guinea pig rearing has become very popular in urban and rural farms due to its low capital requirement. We empower our members to increase their incomes through viable enterprises and this is just one of them. We have highlighted a few topics, others will be released as need arises. We appreciate contribution to our write up to Google.

REPRODUCTION

The timing of the first litter for the female is critical in breeding guinea pigs. While males can be used for breeding purposes any time after they are three or four months old, female guinea pigs should be bred the first time between four and seven months of age. This is related to the separation of certain pelvic bones just prior to delivery.

In the week prior to delivery of a litter, the bones of the pelvis of the female guinea pig begin to separate. By delivery time a portion of the pelvis will have separated to just over an inch in width. If a guinea pig is not bred before seven months of age the bones of the pelvis become fused and unable to separate.

If this condition is not discovered in time, dystocia (difficult delivery) will likely take the life of both the female and her litter. Caesarean section births can be performed by a Veterinarian, but doing surgery on guinea pigs is always risky because of their inability to handle anesthetic well.

Guinea pig gestation is approximately **60 to 70 days**, with litter sizes averaging **two to five** young. Although they are not weaned until **14 to 28 days** after birth, guinea pigs are well developed and can see at birth. They are able to eat regular food pellets when they are just **two days old**.

Because they cannot create Vitamin C as many animals can, all guinea pigs require **Vitamin C** to be supplied through foods or supplements. Twenty-five mg. a day is usually adequate for a healthy adult Guinea Pig although pregnant females may require more. Vitamin C should be supplied through supplements like Vitakraft Orange Drops and through foods like cabbage, red and green peppers, asparagus, broccoli, peas, tomatoes, kiwi and oranges.

**Grasses** that provide fiber should also be part of a guinea pig's diet. Hay mini-bales and food for guinea pigs provide the balanced nutrition and fiber needed to keep young guinea pigs and their parents healthy throughout their life.

Bedding and housing considerations are important when breeding guinea pigs. The normal space recommendation per adult guinea pig is **200 square inches**. An enclosure like a home measuring 24" x 36" provides ample space to meet this requirement.
Add to the home some heat dried corn-cob litter or bedding along with some fluffy organic nesting material and your guinea pig will feel right at home.

**Reproduction and Breeding**

Pregnancy and delivery are difficult for guinea pigs. The babies are born large, fully furred, and ready to run. The mother generally carries several pups and her weight may double, putting stress on her circulation system and other organs. Even with the best care, sows can suffer from dystocia, hypocalcemia, a prolapsed uterus, or pregnancy toxemia. For the health and well-being of your beloved pet, do not breed!

A female may deliver 6 pups in a back-to-back pregnancy.

If you have accidentally purchased a mis-sexed pair of guinea pigs and the sow is pregnant, remove the boar immediately. A sow that has just deliverered can become pregnant soon after giving birth. A male guinea pig must not be present during the birth for this reason. Back-to-back pregnancies are extremely hard on a female cavy and not advised.

**Biological Data**

- Normal birth weight of young: 70-100 grams
- Typical litter size: 2-5 cavies [Range: 1 to 7]
- Gestation Period: 59-73 days
- Weaning Age: 14-21 days
- Weaning Weight: 150-200 grams
- Length of estrus cycle: 15-17 days
- Milk Composition: 3.9% fat, 8.1% protein, and 3.0% lactose
- Earliest Reproductive Age - Female: 4 weeks
- Earliest Reproductive Age - Male: 3 weeks
Remember:
Female guinea pigs can be sexually mature as early as 4 weeks of age.

Given the early ages at which some males and females are sexually mature (females have reportedly been impregnated by 24 day old males), it is advised to remove the male young by 3 weeks at the latest.

- Sexual maturity (female): 4-6 weeks
- Sexual maturity (male): 3-5 weeks

While not all males may be fertile this early, the safest action is to separate the males from females by 3 weeks of age.

Pregnancies of very young sows are also difficult for the animal. Food for her developing and maturing body is diverted to the young fetuses. While intentional breeding is never recommended, young cavies can successfully carry to term.

Breeding after 8 months of age can be fatal for a guinea pig that has not had a previous litter due to dystocia. The symphysis (a joint of tough fibrous cartilage which firmly joins the 2 pubic bones) becomes less flexible upon reaching adulthood and may not separate fully, making delivery difficult.

- Pubic symphsis begins to separate late in the pregnancy due to the hormone relaxin. About 48 hours before birth, you may be able to feel a gap of 15mm or so. At birth it can increase to 2.5 cm (1-1.5”). "If the first breeding is delayed past 7 or 8 months, the symphysis separates less easily, and fat pads occlude the pelvic canal. Such impediments may lead to dystocia and death, especially when small litters of large young are involved."

Sows with dystocia usually need a caesarian section. The survival rate is very poor. Spaying or neutering guinea pigs also carries risks even when performed by an experienced guinea pig veterinarian. The safest choice is to keep the sexes separate or have only sows or boars. Sows who become pregnant at an older age can sometimes deliver successfully but because of the added risks, pregnancies should be avoided. All pregnancies carry risk.

If your older sow has become pregnant, the safest course is to allow the pregnancy to proceed normally but line up an experienced vet in case there are complications.
Another alternative is terminate the pregnancy. All surgery also carries risk.

**ESTRUS**

Harkness and Wagner in *The Biology and Medicine of Rabbits and Rodents* state that the estrus cycle in guinea pigs is **15 to 17 days**. Since most sows will have an estrus (a time when they can become pregnant) **from 2 to 15 hours immediately after giving birth**, remove any boar from the cage as the delivery date approaches to prevent back-to-back pregnancies which would be physically stressful for any sow. They claim the estrus period occurs for 24 to 48 hours, 6 to 11 hours of which the female will accept the male.

A guinea pig is in estrus when the mucous plug is dissolved. The plug seals the vaginal opening when she is not in estrus. The plug will dissolve approximately every 10 to 21 days. To check if it's dissolved, just see if the top of the "y" is separating to create an opening. It's open approximately for 24 hours and then it starts to close or plug up again.”

Every pregnancy carries risks: pregnancy toxemia and dystocia can be life threatening.

*Clinical signs of pregnancy toxemia:*

The sow stops eating, becomes depressed, and adopts a hunched, ruffled appearance. She may salivate profusely and the characteristic smell of ketones can be detected on her breath as she becomes ketoacidotic. The condition progresses to muscle spasms and death. The signs often occur abruptly. Pregnancy toxemia is more prevalent in hot weather.

**Breeding**

This is just a run down on some of the most important information you'll need to know if you plan to breed your pet guinea pigs, or if you find yourself with a pregnant sow. My advice is to learn AS MUCH as you can now - before the 'big day' arrives, or before you make the move to house male and female guinea pigs together. It can be as straightforward as 'finding some new babies in the cage one morning', or it can be as devastating as loosing the bubs and/or mum for a variety of reasons...
1. Guinea pigs DO NOT change sex. They are born male or female. The 'changing sex' myth has only come about through many mistaken gender incidents!

2. It is possible to determine gender at birth if you are practised. Girl's have a more 'sectioned' and flatter look with a 'Y' shape, boys have a line with a penis bud at the top - kind of like an 'i' shape. You will also be able to feel the ridge of the penis just along the top of the genitals if you run your finger over the area gently. In older males, gentle pressure above the genitals will protrude the penis - pretty hard proof that you have a boy on your hands! Cavy Spirit have an excellent page on determining gender as well - lots of very clear photos. If you are still ever unsure, please get your guinea pig checked by an experienced vet or a breeder. I am also more than happy to sex guinea pigs of any age.

3. Male and female guinea pigs can become fertile between 4-10 weeks of age. This is why it is so important to have gender correct from the beginning.

4. Females are safest not bred before 4 months (or before they reach 600g). Assess your sow and retire her before she gets too elderly/frail. We tend to retire our girls at between 2-3yrs of age. This way they will have delivered 3-4 litters over the course of those years, we've been able to keep the best offspring for continuing the lines, but don't need to tax her body any further.

5. But, pregnancy can be fatal for a female who is allowed to get pregnant for the first time after the age of 12months? (the ligaments surrounding the pelvic bone can become rigid, meaning that the babies have no way to be born. In this situation she will need a c-section, which has a very poor survival rate for her and her babies). Please note that NOT all older females will have trouble, but there is an increased risk simply due to the physiology of getting older. Some girls have been known to have their first litter at 3yrs old, and do fine - you would have to have a long think about knowingly putting an older sow at risk like this though. I have personally had to watch one of my 16month old females (born at our caviary - but returned from her previous home
pregnant), try to deliver her first litter with a 'fused' pelvis. She was rushed to the vet where she underwent a C-section. All 4 babies were dead, and she too passed about 2hrs post operation. It often ends up being a costly, and traumatic exercise.

6. A female who has just delivered a litter is fertile again immediately following birth, so should not be left anywhere a male could get access to her. Back to back litters are incredibly stressful on their little bodies. It is best to allow at least 3-4 months rest between birth and re-introduction to a male if you wish to breed your female again. This will allow the female time to re-gain some condition. This will also give you approx two litters per year. More than enough for one little guinea pig! If your guinea pig has not handled pregnancy, birth or nursing very well then it is best not to breed her again. Next time you may not get such a good result.

7. It is possible to have a healthy litter of babies, only to loose the mum due to blood loss, infection, toxaemia, or a variety of other complications. If you can, try and time deliveries so that you have two females due together. If something happens to one mum, the other may be able to foster the orphans. If a mother dies within the first 24-48hrs, there are no other recently delivered mothers available to foster, and the babies are very small, you will need to supplement their diet with a suitable small mammal milk formula (Divetalact). Most vets should be able to point you in the right direction, or even sell you a suitable mix. In the past I have successfully used a kangaroo milk formula (this does not have the right balance of proteins/fats etc, but did keep the baby alive until he was old enough to survive on solids). I have also had good results using breast milk, though this will be hard for most people to come by! Now a days there is actually a guinea pig specific milk formula you can purchase, though it may be a bit hard to source. You will also need to mimic the mother's cleaning of the baby's bottom by gently wiping the bottom with a wet cotton ball to encourage the baby to defecate. This routine will need to continue until the baby is strong enough to survive on solids alone - usually at about 1 week old. I did have a litter of four sisters loose their mother suddenly at 4 days old though, and they thrived despite her absence. Guinea pigs are very resilient little creatures!
7. Something about the smell/hormones from a birthing guinea pig can prematurely bring on the labour of other pregnant guinea pigs if they are housed in close proximity to the birth-in-progress. This is not so much of a problem if you have mothers due very close together, but can be devastating if the other mum’s are not near their due date. For the reason, I remove my pregnant females from the main group before I expect delivery.

8. A guinea pig’s pelvic bone (just above her genitals) will open to approx 2-fingers width when she is about to have her babies. For most guinea pigs, this full dilation will occur about a day before birth. The pelvic bone will usually start to slowly open from 1-2 weeks before full dilation.
7. Guinea pigs can miscarry their babies in some stressful situations or cases of poor mother/foetal health. In this instance, it is not uncommon for the mum to eat all/part of the foetus. This is a controversial topic in the guinea pig world with many denying it happens, but I have witnessed it first hand. Quite a few times. It is gruesome, but also an evolutionary behaviour, and occurs for similar reasons to the eating of the placenta after normal delivery. The guinea pig is trying to keep the area as clean and odour-free as possible so as not to alert predators that she has just given birth.

8. Guinea pigs can also accidentally injure their young when giving birth. If the baby gets stuck they use their teeth to help pull it out. If they panic or grab an ear/limb/body, they can seriously harm their baby. It is always worth while being present for a birth if possible.

9. Many perfectly healthy babies can die because a mother is inexperienced or
distracted when cleaning her babies following delivery, and doesn't remove the membrane from the baby's face quickly enough. If you are present for a birth, and the mother hasn't made an attempt to break the sack then you will need to intervene. Give her space to do it herself first, but if you feel it has been too long, or she has chosen to continue to clean an older baby - gently pick the new baby up, break the membrane with your finger nail or rub it away with a clean towel. Pay attention to the face/nose. Gently rub the little body to help encourage the first breath. Once the baby is breathing, return it to it's mother so she can finish cleaning it and recognise it as one of her litter.

10. Be VERY careful about pairing up male and female guinea pigs with any roan hair in their coat. If you suspect roan colouring, my best advice is do not breed the animal unless you are certain their partner is roan-genetics-free. Roan x roan matings frequently produce genetically deformed pink-eyed white offspring called 'lethals'. If they are not born dead, or die shortly after birth then they are usually sentenced to a short, difficult existence. Information and knowledge is the key to stopping the unnecessary / accidental breeding of these poor creatures.

(Please note this is not my image - just one found on google. A search for 'roan guinea pig images' will give you an idea of all the different ways this gene can manifest in a coat)
In general, guinea pig pregnancy and birth come with some significant risks. Birth for mammals is a dangerous, but necessary event. None more so than for guinea pigs, who carry their young until they are very developed and exceptionally large (comparable to the average woman giving birth to a 3-yr old!). Breeding guinea pigs can be an incredibly magical experience, but more often than not it can also be heartbreakingly tragic. Please don't knowingly place a male and female together unless you feel competent to handle any of the very common pregnancy/birth/newborn complications, have a responsible plan for the resulting offspring and are able to do so with the utmost respect for your animals:

- Allow your female to get to an appropriate age.
- Keep her well fed, with lots of extra good quality food and vitamin c.
- Separate her from any males well before birth.
- Separate her from other pregnant females.
- Try and be present, but unobtrusive for the birth.
- Get any resulting babies sexed correctly as soon as you can.
- Separate baby boys from 3-4 weeks, depending on how quickly they start practising their 'horny dance'!
- Allow her a decent break (3-4months) before further litters, if any more at all.

If you have ANY questions at all about anything I've written on this page, don't hesitate to email me (eleb2000@hotmail.com). This information has been compiled from my own experience and research over many many years! Also, if you think there is something I've have left out - please let me know! It's hard to choose what is the most important information!
Guinea pigs have a biological make up that creates special nutritional needs for them. Unable to synthesize (create) Vitamin C themselves as most other animals can, guinea pigs must have Vitamin C supplied through Vitamin C fortified guinea pig pellets and fresh vegetables.

Fiber in the appropriate quantity is also essential in the diet of guinea pigs. Additional fiber should be supplied through unlimited amounts of hay. Additional Vitamin C can and should be supplied in fresh fruits and vegetables which should not be more than 10-15% of the diet. The following fruits and vegetables are recommended:

- Leafy greens such as sukuma wiki and spinach
- Cabbage
- Red and Green Peppers
- Asparagus
- Broccoli
- Peas
- Tomatoes
- Dandelion Greens
- Oranges
- Lemons

The recommended amount of food pellets to feed varies with each manufacturer based on the nutrition each product supplies. For mature guinea pigs, ¼ to 1/3 cup daily is hereby recommended. Be sure not to feed rabbit pellets to your guinea pigs. While similar in appearance, rabbit pellets have a different nutritional mix than that needed by guinea pigs.
Commercial pellets should always be used when fresh. The reason fresh pellets should be used is that Vitamin C breaks down in a matter of weeks, which means your guinea pig will not get the full benefit of the Vitamin C. Guinea pigs deprived of appropriate levels of Vitamin C will, over time, develop the disease known as scurvy.

Guinea pigs are finicky eaters and do not easily tolerate changes in the flavor or make up of their diet. Any changes should be gradually introduced over a period of two to three weeks.

Guinea pigs practice coprophagy, that is, they eat their own special feces. As unappealing as it sounds, "cecostropes" (soft feces) supply both Vitamin B and Vitamin K to guinea pigs. Guinea pigs deprived of cecotropes will eventually develop malnutrition and will die.

**NUTRITION BASICS FOR GUINEA PIGS**

Guinea pigs are herbivores who will eat just about anything that smells and tastes like a plant. However, this doesn't necessarily simplify your responsibility in providing a proper diet for your pet. Remember that proper nutrition is not what the animal will eat, but what he should eat.

For a guinea pig, the proper diet should be one based on hay, supplemented by pellets, fresh vegetables and fruit in proper proportions. An imbalance in nutrition can cause chronic diarrhea, obesity and diseases of the heart, liver and kidneys.

A guinea pig must have a daily intake of about 6% to 10% of his body weight. If a guinea pig weighs 2 pounds (approximately 1 kg, which is average for an adult), he needs to eat around 2-3.2 ounces per day (60-100g/day). This is roughly one-fourth to one-third of a cup of food per day. This amount must contain 20% protein, 4% fat, less than 20% fiber and 30-50 mg of Vitamin C.

Water intake should be at least 150 ml a day.

**Foods for Your Guinea**

**Hay:** A handful daily. Guinea pigs require this kind of fiber for proper digestion, therefore it must be available at all times. Make sure you purchase good, clean hay from a pet store. It should be dry, free from molds and sweet smelling. Store the hay where it won't get wet and moldy. A good quality hay is recommended, but a legume hay like clover is acceptable. Alfalfa can be used, but it promotes obesity. Never substitute with hay cubes used for other domestic livestock.

**Vegetables:** A small amount of fresh, organically grown greens is the best. Lettuce, dandelion greens, carrot tops, spinach and any other dark green veggies, eaten daily, provide the all-important Vitamin C and many other vitamins and minerals beneficial to
your guinea pig’s health. Remember to wash all produce thoroughly to remove traces of harmful pesticides.

**Pellets:** Use the instructions on the packaging as a guide. Commercial brands of guinea pig food are specially formulated to provide the proper balanced nutrition with the ideal daily dosage of Vitamin C and other essential nutrients. Choose pellets that have been veterinarian tested and approved. Remember, pellets should not be the guinea pig’s sole diet. Fresh vegetables and hay are daily essentials.

**Fruits:** A small amount daily. Guinea pigs love oranges, apples, pears, strawberries and peaches. They should be given in moderation, as a supplement to their regular diet.

**Treats:** Cereals, tomatoes, carrots and prepared guinea pig treats may be added occasionally. Avoid giving treats that contain sugar or salt. Nuts and seeds should be offered sparingly because of their high fat content, which can lead to unhealthy weight gain.

**Salt lick:** To help maintain mineral balance, provide a salt lick for your guinea. Keep it elevated to prevent contamination.

Feed your guinea pig on a consistent schedule, twice a day, morning and evening. Guinea pigs will overeat if given the chance, so, to prevent obesity, remove food that remains uneaten one hour after it was presented. Never add new food, including hay, before cleaning out the old food.

**Presentation**

**Racks:** Use two racks, one for hay and one for greens. The rack keeps the food clean and accessible.

**Bowl:** The feeding bowl should be large and sturdy to avoid spillage. Keep it clean to avoid bacterial growth. Discard leftover pellets and serve only fresh mixes.

**Bottle:** You should have a good supply of fresh water. Make sure it never runs dry. Choose a water bottle with a metal (or other hard material) spout, otherwise the guinea pig will chew off the tube. Clean the water bottle regularly.

**Temperature:** Serve food at room temperature. Cold food could cause digestion problems.

**Vitamin C**

The most important thing to remember about guinea pigs is they are unable to synthesize Vitamin C and are very susceptible to a deficiency. To prevent your guinea pig from contracting **scurvy**, he will need 30-50 mg per day. Although vitamins and minerals abound in fresh vegetables and fruits, and correct proportions are provided in
commercial mixes, supplements may be beneficial. Consult our Dietary Supplements Section for products and information.

Food Sensitivity

Your guinea pig may be sensitive to certain foods, particularly greens. One symptom is diarrhea. If this occurs, start by cutting back on the greens. If the symptoms continue, omit one food at a time to isolate the irritant, then refrain from serving that particular food.

Cecotropes

Nature has provided guinea pigs with an unusual method for supplementing their unique nutritional needs. Cecotropes are small, soft pellets that contain nutrients absorbed from plants during the digestive process. They pass from the large intestine, out the anus and are consumed immediately. While this process may look bizarre or even revolting, you must not discourage it. Cecotropes are necessary for your guinea pig's survival.

Guinea pigs are strict herbivores, or vegetarians, that don't tolerate high carbohydrate or fatty diets. In the wild, they live on the hills and mountains of the Andes in Peru and graze all day, mostly on grasses and some foliage and other plant materials.

The nutritional needs of adult non-breeding, non-lactating, and inactive pet guinea pigs have not been as well established as some of the other plant-eating small mammals. The nutritional requirements for guinea pigs used for breeding and scientific research is very different than the needs for our house pet guinea pig.

The recommended diet for pet guinea pigs consists of fresh guinea pig pellets (18 to 20 percent crude protein and 10 to 16 percent fiber), an unlimited supply of high quality grass hay (Timothy hay), fresh vegetables, plenty of vitamin C, and a steady supply of clean water.

Vitamin C

Guinea pigs MUST have vitamin C (ascorbic acid) added to their diet. Similar to humans, their body cannot make the vitamin and must rely on a vitamin C supplement. Although commercial guinea pig pellets contain extra vitamin C, it is active for only 90 days under the most ideal (dark, cool) storage conditions.

Realistically, the potency is most likely lost in five to six weeks from the date that is on the package. It is best to assume that not enough vitamin C is being supplied and to supplement adequate levels in the form of vegetables, fruit and putting vitamin C in the drinking water. Because vitamin C is light sensitive and loses 50 percent of its potency in 24 hours, you should cover the water bottle with a sock or foil. Also, change the water and add vitamin C daily.
Vegetables and fruits that have 20 mg of Vitamin C or more per ounce include: guava, orange and lemon with peel, parsley, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, collard, mustard greens and kale. Moreover, many guinea pigs like the taste of chewable vitamin C tablets and can be trained to eat them.

The optimum vitamin C required is 1 to 2 mg/100 grams of body weight daily. A male's average adult weight is 900 to 1,200 grams and female's is 700 to 900 grams. Because vitamin C is water soluble and the kidneys excrete excess amounts, overdosing is rarely a problem.

Grass Hay

One of the most important items in the guinea pig diet is grass hay, which should be fed in unlimited quantities to both adults and baby guinea pigs. It is important to provide an unlimited source of hay because pellets do not provide enough long fiber to keep their intestines in good working order. The long fibers stimulate muscle contraction of the intestines to improve and maintain gut motility to prevent gastrointestinal obstruction.

Chewing hay is also important. Like rabbits, the molars in guinea pigs are constantly growing and must be ground down by chewing. Constant chewing on hay promotes healthy and normal wear on their molars. Treats and chew sticks are not efficient at wearing the teeth.

Alfalfa hay is rich in protein and calcium, but when combined with pellets it doesn't have the proper ratio of calcium and phosphorus. This can lead to improper gastrointestinal motility, such as diarrhea. It also may predispose certain guinea pigs to calcium oxalate bladder or kidney stones. Timothy hay is a better choice and is becoming more readily available. It's important to keep your guinea pig sleek, so cut down on the amount of protein and calorie-rich pellets while feeding Timothy hay.

Pellets

It is important to feed pellets that are made specifically for guinea pigs. These pellets have vitamin C added to them, so buy fresh pellets and store them in a cool place.

Guinea pigs don't tolerate high carbohydrate or fatty foods so don't feed them "fiesta" or "gourmet" pellet mixtures that have seeds, nuts or dried fruits. Because pellets tend to be higher in protein and calories, you need to restrict the amount you give him once he is an adult to prevent obesity.

Vegetables

Fresh vegetables - kale, carrot tops and spinach - can help maintain a healthy intestinal tract, while providing plenty of vitamins and minerals. When you start to add vegetables to your pet's diet, offer only one type at a time, so if there are digestive upsets you'll know what's causing them.
Fortify the Water

Make sure your pet has plenty of fresh, clean water fortified with vitamin C. Water should be changed daily, and containers cleaned to prevent build-up of algae and bacteria.

Offer New Foods Gradually

Generally, guinea pigs are afraid of new things and any diet changes should be made slowly. They have a specialized digestive tract comparable to that of a rabbit or a horse, which enables them to extract nutrients from plant material. There is a diverticulum (like our appendix except proportionately larger) called the cecum, which stores and mixes the ingested material providing a perfect environment for bacteria to ferment and break down plant fibers. Periodically, the cecum is emptied and the intestinal tract then absorbs the essential nutrients.

Changes to the bacteria can hinder the ability to digest their food and cause harmful bacteria (like Clostridium) to overgrow and cause illness. This is why giving antibiotics and changing the diet should be done with caution.

Good Nutrition - Cornerstone of Good Health

There is no greater service you can do your guinea pigs than to provide them a proper diet.

Providing proper nutrition is essential to good health. Diet affects, "coat, skin, growth, energy, appetite, teeth, reproduction, organ effectiveness, immunity and ability to fight off disease/infection". Fresh water, quality pellets and hay make up the backbone of a good diet. A variety of fresh vegetables supplement their requirements for vitamin C and other micro nutrients.

Nutrition is a vast and complex subject. We all have our own thoughts on what to feed our pets; ideas shaped by preconceptions, tradition, cultural beliefs, and our own views on human nutrition. Cost, availability and convenience also come into play. A few people will strive to provide an all natural diet, but the majority of us will include a pelleted feed specifically designed for guinea pigs, along with grass hay and fresh vegetables.

Remember, guinea pigs are herbivores!

Avoid these foods:

- Don't fall for commercial treats marketed for cavies (like yoghurt drops) which can
even be detrimental to their health. Consuming these empty calories (many contain fat, sugars and even excess calcium) can result in decreased consumption of the basic foods they really need.

- Do not feed **mixes** or treats with nuts, seeds, dried fruit and dyed pieces.
- Do not use **mineral wheels**.
- Do not feed **meat**.
- Do not feed **rabbit pellets** (they do not contain Vitamin C and some may even include antibiotics toxic to cavies).
- Do not feed **dairy products**.

**On Dairy Products:**

Guinea pigs require specific amounts of calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium, and therefore recommending feeding vitamin D-fortified cow's milk or other animals' feed may promote metastatic calcification, acidosis, ketosis, or skin disease from vitamin A or D toxicity.

Another reason not to use cows milk is to encourage the orphans to eat solid foods as early as possible as a high percentage of orphans which receive too much milk replacer develop cataracts and become blind. The development of cataracts is thought to be associated with the intake of too many complex sugars which are dissimilar to those found in natural guinea pig milk.