**Chinchillas – Care Sheet**

**Chinchilla:** *Chinchilla lanigera*

A chinchilla is one of the most entertaining pets anyone could own. Watching them bounce, leap, and dart around can provide a great deal of fun for adults and closely supervised children. However, chinchillas have very specific needs to make sure they stay safe and healthy. They require an owner who is fully aware of and willing to make sure those needs are met.

**Basic info:**

Age: 10-15 years

Weight: 14-28 oz. (400-800 grams)

Sexual maturity: 7 to 10 months

Gestation: 105-115 days

**Behavior:**

By now, you’ve likely seen many videos on the Internet of chinchillas acting weirdly. Actually, they’re just being themselves! They like to run, jump, and climb. Unfortunately, they also have very delicate skeletons, which means injuries can happen. They also like to chew on anything they can get a hold of, including electrical cords.

Chinchillas are also highly social, meaning it is better to keep them in pairs when possible. However, some chinchillas respond negatively if they have already lived in a cage and a new friend is introduced. Females can be quite aggressive, so many times it is best to keep same-sex pairs or to give each chinchilla its own cage. Chinchillas are also very clean animals, although they are difficult to litter train.

**Diet:**

Chinchillas should always have a ready supply of timothy hay around to munch on. The fiber promotes digestive health, and it is also good for their teeth. It is also important to make sure they have fresh, clean water available in a bottle.

Chinchillas do not require much food. Many only need 1 or 2 tablespoons of pellets a day. It is okay to give treats of alfalfa hay, dried fruit or fresh vegetables, but they must be in *very* small (for example, a 1-inch cube of dried fruit) quantities to avoid obesity.

**Environment & Caging:**

Since chinchillas like to move around so much, it is important to

provide them with a large cage that gives them plenty of room to move around. For chinchillas, this means a multi-level cage that has different spots for them to perch on and safely climb around. We recommend all floors and shelves are solid, not wire mesh. Chinchillas do best in cooler temperatures, about 65°F to 75°F, as heat stroke can occur if it gets too warm. Make sure their cage and play area include:

* Hide boxes for each chinchilla: This is important since cage mates will want to take a break from each other.
* Wooden cage furniture and chew toys, chew sticks and pumice stones: These are important for dental health
* An exercise wheel
* Marble slabs are sold to lay on shelves for the chinchilla to have a cool area to sit on

Make sure you chinchilla-proof all chewing hazards and possible escape routes in the cage and play area. That means protecting electrical cords and removing other potentially dangerous objects. We can help you understand your responsibilities. Additionally, the cage should be routinely cleaned for fecal matter and urine. Since they have delicate skeletons, skin, and fur, it is essential that a child is closely monitored whenever handling a chinchilla.

**Veterinary Care & Home Care:**

One of the chinchilla’s most important needs is the dust bath. Chinchillas have very dense fur, which means if they get wet they can have trouble drying, which can cause fungus to develop. Instead, chinchillas, which hail from the Andes Mountains, “bathe” in volcanic ash. For your pet chinchilla, you can buy a home dust bath kit. They will need to take this dust bath for 10-15 minutes at least 4 to 5 times a week. We can help you understand your options. It’s not as scary as it sounds! In fact, it is very entertaining! If you own males, you will also need to check for penile hair rings every month. Signs include constant grooming of the area, straining to urinate, or only urinating a bit at a time. This can be an extremely serious condition requiring prompt veterinary care.

For regular veterinary care, we recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months, where we will perform a fecal exam for parasites. Other common issues to look for include:

* Dental issues that can cause drooling and problems eating
* Eye conditions, from mild irritation to conjunctivitis
* Fur and skin disorders, such as ringworm
* Gastrointestinal problems
* Respiratory infections