

# Chinchillas

Chinchillas are crepuscular rodents that are native to the Andes Mountains in South America. They have thick coats that protect them from cold climates -a coat which contains upwards of 60 hairs per follicle. Chinchillas are fragile creatures that have very small bones. Care should be given when handling them.

## Housing

- Cages should be constructed of metal. (This includes the base.) Ferret cages, rat cages, certain rabbit cages, certain medium/large bird cages and chinchilla cages are all acceptable to use.
- Wire floors or solid floors are acceptable. Your chinchilla should have access to shelving and other solid platforms in wire-bottom cages.
- **There should be no plastic in the cage.** No accessories, platforms, etc.
- Recommended bedding choices include kiln-dried pine, aspen, or fleece. **Cedar, corncob, or paper bedding (carefresh and the like) are not safe to use. They can cause impaction.**
- Your chinchilla's cage should be placed in an area away from direct sunlight and in a room that will not exceed 75 Fahrenheit. Anything above this temperature will increase your pet's risk of overheating, and potentially a heat stroke.
- Clean the cage with a mild solution of vinegar/water or dawn/water. Hydrogen peroxide can be used on wood shelves to lift urine.

## Tips

- Kiln dried Pine can be purchased to make your own ledge, huts, chews.
- Farm stores carry hay bales, hay cubes, and pine horse/livestock bedding. This is safe!
- Fleece can be purchased and used for accessories as other fabric materials are not safe.

# Diet

- Chinchillas are herbivores that thrive on a basic diet of pellets and hay.
- Pellets should not contain treats, dried fruit, or nuts. Chinchillas will pick out non-pellet pieces and deprive themselves of nutrition. In addition, the pellets such brands are not nutritionally sound.
- Grass hay - loose or cubes can be offered. Timothy, alfalfa (great for growers), orchard
- *Occasional* treats are OK. Safe treats: Rose-hips, goji berries, plain cheerios, plain shredded wheat, raw oats. Should not exceed 1-2 times a week.
- **Fruit, vegetables (including freeze dried), seeds, corn, and nuts are unsafe and unhealthy.** Produce and excessive treats can harm your chinchilla's digestive tract and cause further health ailments such as fatty liver disease.
- Chinchilla teeth should remain a yellow/orange hue. White teeth in adult chinchillas require evaluation of their diet and a boost in calcium. (Original flavored tums, cuttle bone, and alfalfa hay can be offered to correct the issue.) If it does not resolve, consult a veterinarian.

## Safe chinchilla feed list

Kent Pro Hutch 16 Rabbit Food (this is what we feed)

Oxbow Chinchilla Essentials (red bag- not the naturals) \*Good for pet owners not buying in bulk\*

Mazuri Chinchilla Food \*Good for pet owners not buying in bulk\*

Blue Seal Show Hutch Deluxe Rabbit Food

Mana PRO Rabbit Food (If you find corn in your bag, discontinue use)

Mana Pro SHO Rabbit food (see above ‘‘corn’’)

Purina Rabbit Chow SHO

Producers Pride Rabbit Feed

## Grooming

- Chinchillas do not require water baths or brushing. However, they do require dust (not sand) baths made specifically for chinchillas.
- They should have access to this at least once a week. The dust should not be kept in the cage 24/7.

## Exercise

- Chinchillas do not require playtime outside of the cage.
- If offered, Playtime should be in a chin-proof room or preferably a playpen.
- (Hide cords and unsafe items, close toilet seats if in a bathroom, no open water sources.)
- They can be given a running wheel for in-cage exercise but this is not required. They are usually special-orders. **Wheels need to be at least 15" in diameter. No plastic. No wire wheels.** A chinchilla needs to properly stretch its back when running to avoid hunchback. The "chin spin" by quality cage is one of few proper chinchilla wheels. Good wheels will last a lifetime.
- Harness are **not safe** and can crush their ribs.
- "Roll around" Exercise balls are **not safe**. They are known as "death balls."

Holding by the base of the tail (near the rump) and supporting the chest is the safest way to handle a chinchilla. Mid - tip of the tail should not be grabbed or pulled to prevent deglove.

## One or Two?

Chinchillas do well on their own. Rule of thumb is to only get a second if *you* want a second. There is always a chance two will not get along or fight later in life. This means two separate animals and two separate set-ups! Chinchillas should be kept in same-sex groups or pairings and not allowed to mix with opposite sexes - this includes no "monitored playtime" as breeding takes seconds.