



# GUIDE TO BASIC CHINCHILLA CARE

## General Information on Chinchillas:

- Chinchillas originate from the Andes Mountains in South America. The wild chinchillas are now mainly found in the Chilean Andes.
- 2 Species of Chinchilla –
  - Chinchilla chinchilla (previously brevicaudata) – short tail chinchilla
  - Chinchilla lanigera – long tailed chinchilla - domestic chinchillas have descended from this species.Both species of chinchillas are listed as critically endangered by the IUCN and are thought to be extinct in Bolivia and Peru
- The kits stay with their mother 8 to 12 weeks to make sure they are the correct weight and are fully weaned. Never purchase a chinchilla younger than 8 weeks.
- Understand your kit, when the kit is taken away from the mother to the new home and surroundings, the kit will be skittish and scared, allow your new baby to familiarise himself/herself with the new home and surroundings.
- Chinchillas do much better with a friend than alone as they are very social animals. You can either have a same sex pair or you can have one sterilised (usually the male as it is lower risk). If you can get same sex siblings which have been together from birth, that is first prize. They require a lot of love and attention, especially if they are the only pet, but still may get depressed. (I will cover breeding in another article).
- Chinchillas are crepuscular which means more awake in the early evening and early morning hours and sleep during the day. This makes them the ideal pet for parents which are away during the day.
- A chinchilla is a long-term pet – they live 12 to 15 plus years. The oldest recorded chinchilla died when he was almost 30 years old.
- A chinchilla has no smell.
- Chinchillas do not bite or scratch (except the odd exception).
- Chinchillas do make a few sounds, but for most of the time they are quiet pets.
- Please remember they are **not outdoor pets** and must be kept indoors in the coolest room.
- Chinchillas aren't really children's' pets. Most do not like to be held tight and snuggled and picked up. They enjoy running around and jumping over you! There are the exceptions though (both children and chinchilla's)

## Information regarding the Diet of your Chinchilla:

- Chinchillas must be fed high quality pellet based feed made to accommodate their dietary needs. Please do not buy the mixes that contain corn, fruit and vegetables – these are extremely unhealthy for your chinchillas and may lead to diseases such as fatty liver disease or diabetes. The best is a single pellet rather than a mix. A mix they can pick and choose what they want to eat, whereas a single pellet they are getting all the nutrients from that pellet.
- In addition to the pellet they must be fed grass hay daily – can free feed. Teff and Eragrostis are grass hays. The hay must always be fresh and never wet or old.
- Lucerne (legume hay) can be given 2 to 3 times a week in small quantities. Lucerne is a power food and the best for teeth. Lucerne must be limited as it is high in sugars and calcium.
- If your hay gets wet or damp, it is best to throw it away as fungus can grow on it which may be fatal to your chinchilla.
- Straw is not hay!
- Chinchillas teeth are permanently growing, make sure they are given the correct hay and chew toys to prevent teeth problems.
- There are a few safe treats that can be given.
  - Goji berries; can be given daily, only one to two pieces a day.
  - Weet-bix (dry); can give a quarter once a week.
  - Rolled oats; tiny amount daily.
  - Rosehips, whole or shells.

There are other treats, I have never used them nor given my chinchilla's so will not name them. Certain of the treats I've seen advertised may cause miscarriage in a pregnant chinchilla. The above I know are safe even for pregnant or lactating females.

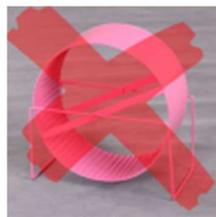
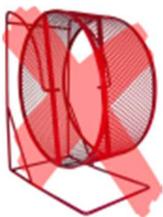
- Fresh water should always be available for your chinchilla and please monitor the intake of the water. It is preferable to use boiled and cooled water or bottled water.
- Water can be given either in bowls or water bottles.
- The water bottles and the food dishes must be cleaned regularly.
- Spot clean the cage daily and do a proper clean at least weekly.

## What do you need before you bring home your new chinchilla?

- First of all, you need a cage; the cage must be as big as you can possibly afford, but minimum size of 800mm (length) x 600mm (wide) x 1000mm (height). Bar width I wouldn't go wider than 2cm. As chinchilla's like to jump, height is very important. This is a guide for the minimum requirement, your chinchilla will not complain if you give them a bigger cage!
- A 250ml water bottle or water bowl that can be screwed into the side of the cage
- Food dish (rather not plastic, it will get chewed) – the ones that screw into the side of the cage are probably the best as your chinchilla can't tip the bowl over as easily.
- Hay dish or hay rack if you use fleece to line the cage. I use Teff or Eragrostis to cover the bottom of my cages – that way my chinchillas have access to grass hay at all times. It's also easy to spot clean.
- Shelving/ledges, untreated dry pine is the safest option. This is important as they love to jump.
- Safe wooden chew toys.
- They need a wooden nest/sleep house. This must also be safe wood.
- Safe wood:
  - ❖ Untreated, kiln dried pine
  - ❖ Mulberry
  - ❖ Sekelbos
  - ❖ Apple
  - ❖ Pear
  - ❖ Willow

These should be boiled and dried properly before giving to your chinchilla. Make sure the trees have not been sprayed with insecticide or other poisons/fungicides.

- There are a few cage accessories, hammocks, cage liners (if desired) and tunnels. I prefer not to use the fleece covered tunnels as after a while the chinchillas chew the fleece and can get a leg caught while jumping and end up hanging from the tunnel.
- You may provide a wheel, but please ensure it has a diameter of at least 38cm and does not have bars on the side (commonly used for hedgehogs), or mesh base.



## **There are a few things you must always keep in mind with Chinchillas:**

- Check the room temperature as chinchillas cannot get too warm. The ideal temperature is 21 to 25 degrees; they will die of heat stroke if they overheat. Maximum temperature is 28 degrees.
- Have backup frozen ice bottles (make sure you cover with fleece to prevent the chinchillas chewing the bottle), granite/marble stones or ice bricks (also cover with fleece) available.
- Allow the chinchillas play time – maximum 30 minutes at a time to prevent overheating.
- Chinchillas must take sand baths in a safe bowl. You can leave the sand in all the time. In our climate it assists in keeping the chinchillas cool as it stays cool and they lie in the sand bowl. Just sift the sand daily to take remove the poop and any clumps.
- Only safe woods should be used.

## **What should never happen with your Chinchilla:**

- Never give your chinchilla any Human Food.
- Chinchilla's may never eat fresh fruit or vegetables.
- Only safe treats and no fatty or oily treats. Avoid nuts and raisins.
- Chinchilla's must never be in direct sunlight or in a warm area.
- If your chinchilla gets wet, make sure you towel dry them and then use a hairdryer on the lowest temperature so you don't burn your chinchilla. A bit of water isn't going to harm them, they will not turn into Gremlins and multiply 😊
- Never put a leash or a collar on your chinchilla as this will hurt your Chinchilla badly and possibly lead to death.

## **Three most important rules for a healthy, happy chinchilla:**

- Correct food
- Correct temperature
- Correct hay and some chew toys to keep teeth trimmed

(And of course lots of love and attention)

Most problems/diseases can be prevented by following the above advice!