

TABLE OF CONTENTS

HOUSING

Cage	2
Bedding	2
Furnishings	3

FEEDING

Hay	4
Pellets	4
Treats	4
Safe/Unsafe Treats	4

EXERCISE

Activity	5
Play	5
Wheels	5
Exercise Balls	5
Pet-Proofing	5

SOCIAL NEEDS

Mental Stimulation	6
Bonded Buddies	6
Bonding with Your Chinchilla	6

HANDLING & GROOMING

Safe Handling	7
Grooming	7

HEALTH

General Information	8
Signs of Illness	8
Common Illnesses	9

BEHAVIOR

Vocalization	10
Body Language	10

SUPPLY LIST



HOUSING

CAGE

Specs

Cages must be a minimum of 6 cubic feet per chinchilla. Taller cages with levels are preferred. Bar spacing should be no more than 1" to prevent injuries or escape.

Temperature

The temperature inside the cage should always be between 60° and 70° F with a humidity between 40% and 60%.

Material

Wire-sided cages are preferable because they provide plenty of ventilation and options for climbing. All cage floors, ramps and levels should be solid or covered with fleece since standing on wire can cause injuries and bumblefoot.

BEDDING

Anti-pill fleece blankets or liners are the safest options to line the cage and cover any exposed wire floors because chinchillas are likely to eat other types of bedding or litter and get intestinal blockages. MNPPR strongly recommends to not use bedding or litter of any kind, especially any wood-based beddings due to the extreme sensitivity of chinchillas.



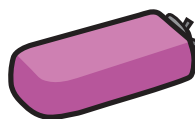
anti-pill fleece

Examples

Critter Nation cages are easy to clean, customize, and move around. Plus, they come in both single and double sizes depending on how much room you have and how many chinchillas you want to keep.



60° - 70°



levels

6 cubic feet per pet



wire cage



HOUSING

FURNISHINGS

Essentials

Set your chinchilla's cage up with the primary essentials including a water bottle, food bowl, lots of chew toys (wood or lava), a wheel, at least one shelter/hide, and a dust bath. Most chinchillas love running on wheels so be sure to provide one of the appropriate size and material. Learn more about wheels in the exercise section of this handbook.

Variety

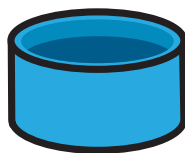
It is important to have a variety of toys, beds, and fun stuff you can rotate to keep your chinchilla interested. Good examples include toilet paper tubes, fiddlesticks, tunnels, bird toys, bits of fabric, ladders, cardboard, and treat balls. Visit the homemade toys tab on our website for more ideas.

Chewing

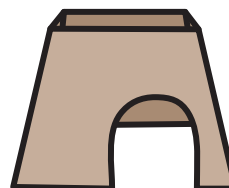
Chinchillas are known to be prolific chewers. Because of this, many owners choose not to allow any plastic at all in their environment. This is the best way to protect your pets from ingesting pieces of plastic that can cause an obstruction and make them ill. There are glass water bottles, ceramic or glass dishes, solid metal or wooden wheels, and wooden hides available on the market.



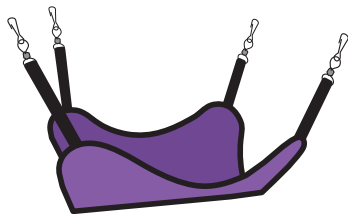
water bottle



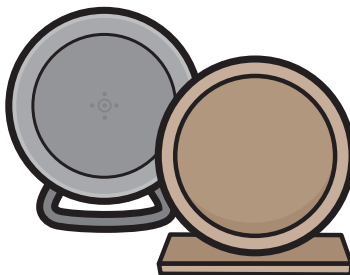
food dish



hides



hammocks



wheel



toys



FEEDING

DIET

Hay

Chinchillas' digestive systems require a constant supply of hay to function properly. An unlimited supply of timothy hay, orchard grass, and/or meadow grass should be available for them to eat at all times. Adult chinchillas should not be given alfalfa since its calcium content is too high and can cause stones to form.

Pellets

Each chinchilla should be given 1/8 cup of timothy pellets a day. Seed mix food should not be used because they are often missing vital nutrients and many chinchillas will only eat their favorite tasting pieces causing an unbalanced diet. At MN Pocket Pet Rescue we prefer to use Oxbow brand pellets.

Treats

Chinchillas have very sensitive digestive systems and should not be given more than a few very small treats a week to prevent serious health problems.

SAFE TREATS

alfalfa hay cubes

carrots

dandelions

dried rose hips

fruit tree twigs

parsley

orchard grass

meadow hay

UNSAFE TREATS

corn

dairy

fruit

meat

nuts

seeds

vegetables (except carrots)



EXERCISE

Activity

Chinchillas are generally most active at dawn and dusk, so spending time with them during these times can be the most rewarding. Chinchillas require at least four hours of free-range playtime every day, even if they have a very large habitat or a wheel in their cage. This includes running around, exploring, and playing with their humans.

Play

Some fun things to try with your chinchilla are making a maze, playing chase with a toy, creating an obstacle course, and hiding food for them to find. Never chase your chinchilla to get them back in their cage. Instead, tempt them back to bed by placing a dust bath in their cage.

Wheels

With all that energy, many chinchillas love to run on wheels. Any wheel should have a solid base and be of the appropriate size for your chinchilla. Never use wire or mesh wheels since tails, toes, and other body parts can get stuck in the mesh or bars and cause serious injuries.

Exercise Balls

Do not use an exercise ball for your chinchilla.

Pet-Proofing

Make sure to pet-proof before play by covering outlets and cords, putting away anything you don't want chewed on, moving houseplants, blocking any small space you cannot reach into such as under the fridge, and securing other pets in a different area or room. Exercise pens can be extremely useful in keeping your pet secure while providing lots of room to run.



SOCIAL NEEDS

COMPANIONSHIP

Mental Stimulation

Chinchillas are very social, smart animals with lots of energy. They love spending time with other chinchillas, their humans, playing games, and solving problems.

Bonded Buddies

Chinchillas are herd animals and will be happiest when living with other chinchillas. It is strongly recommended to keep a minimum of two chinchillas at a time. Unaltered chinchillas should be kept only with other chinchillas of the same sex. Chinchillas have a lot of personality so it can take some time to find a compatible friend and complete the bonding process, but it is worth it for your pet's well-being.

BONDING WITH YOUR CHINCHILLA

Key Components of Training

TRUST • POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT • CONSISTENCY • REPETITION • PATIENCE

Tips

Keep your chinchilla's cage somewhere quiet and out of direct sunlight so they are able to have uninterrupted sleep during the day.

Break your chinchilla's few weekly treats up into tiny pieces to use for training. Each time you approach your pet's cage, bring a small treat so they learn to associate you with pleasant things and look forward to your visits. Never feed treats through cage bars as this can encourage your pet to nip fingers. Offer treats with an open palm when possible.

Speak softly to your chinchilla and call them by their name so they get used to your voice and learn their name.

Spend time around your chinchilla in a location that allows them to come to you if they want to be pet but gives them space to leave if they don't feel like being touched, such as sitting on the floor while you do something else.

Don't grab your chinchilla to put them into or take them out of their cage. Instead, open the doors to let them come and go as they please or use a transport box.



HANDLING & GROOMING

SAFE HANDLING

Picking Up Your Chinchilla

Most chinchillas do not enjoy being picked up, so avoid doing it unless strictly necessary. Talk to your pet and let them sniff your hand before attempting to pick them up so they know it's you. To teach your chinchilla to feel secure while being held, place a treat in the palm of your hand and rest it flat, palm up on the floor of the cage without moving for as long as you are able. When your chinchilla feels comfortable, they will come to sniff your hand and climb onto your palm to take the treat. Once your chinchilla is comfortable being on your hand, you can take them out to play. Always use two hands when picking up your chinchilla. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest. Hold them close to your body and speak softly to comfort them. If your chinchilla is new or too nervous to climb into your hand, utilize a small bed or box using the transport box method. Never pick a chinchilla up by the tail.

GROOMING

Nails

Chinchillas' nails wear down naturally and do not need to be cut. If your chinchilla's nails seem to be getting long, it's an indication that they are not feeling well and should see the vet.

Dental Care

You do not need to brush your chinchilla's teeth, but you must provide plenty of chew toys so they can wear down their teeth naturally. Check your pet's teeth regularly to make sure they are not overgrown or misaligned and take them to the vet if symptoms of dental issues present themselves so they can be addressed by a professional.

Bathing

Chinchillas should **never** be bathed in water. Their fur is so thick that getting it wet can cause serious health problems. Instead, they bathe by rolling around in dust. Place a small amount of small animal dust in a chinchilla sized dust bath house or medium bowl and let your pet roll around until they feel they are clean. Once your chinchilla is finished, remove the dust bath, or else they may start using it as a toilet. Usually, around 20 minutes is sufficient. Change out the dust regularly or if it gets coarse or dirty.

Brushing

Chinchillas should not need to be brushed. If they appear disheveled, offer them a dust bath. If this does not remedy the situation, the animal should see a vet.



HEALTH

GENERAL INFORMATION

Lifespan

Chinchillas live an average of 15 to 20 years.

Reproduction

Chinchillas can reproduce by the age of 4 months old. While it's possible to spay or neuter chinchillas, the surgery can be risky, so most people instead choose to house chinchillas of the same sex together to ensure companionship and prevent breeding.

Routine At Home Health Checks

At least once a week, spend some time examining your chinchilla's fur, skin, and teeth for any physical changes such as lumps, wounds, overgrown teeth or nails, poor coat quality, etc. If any abnormalities are found, it is a good idea to make an appointment with your veterinarian for assessment, as any health concerns can progress quickly.

Annual Exam

All chinchillas should have a yearly veterinary exam to ensure they stay in good health. Chinchillas do not require any vaccines.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Like all pocket pets, chinchillas are very good at hiding when they get sick, so if you see any of the following signs, get in contact with your veterinarian immediately:

ANY BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

LETHARGY

DEFENSIVE AGGRESSION

DISINTEREST IN INTERACTION

HEAD TILT

CHANGES IN EATING/DRINKING

CHANGES IN GROOMING

WATERY EYES

DISINTEREST IN TREATS

POOR COAT QUALITY



HEALTH

COMMON ILLNESSES

Respiratory Infection

Chinchillas are sensitive creatures and easily develop respiratory infections that can become pneumonia. To avoid this, keep your pet's cage away from drafts, clean it often, use fleece bedding, provide as large a habitat as possible, and keep stress to a minimum. *Symptoms include sneezing, labored breathing, chattering, sniffing, eye and nose discharge, weight loss, lack of appetite, and lethargy.*

Dental Problems

Because a chinchilla's teeth continue to grow throughout its life, they need to be continuously worn down by grazing hay and nibbling chew toys. If a chinchilla does not have the correct diet or if its teeth are not properly lined up, the teeth can grow out of control causing pain, abscess, difficulty eating, GI status, and eventually death. This is called malocclusion and can require x-rays, tooth filing, or abscess removal under anesthesia. *Symptoms include drool or saliva build-up on their face, bad breath, decreased appetite, weight loss, lumps on their face, and change in bathroom habits.*

Gastrointestinal Issues

Chinchillas have very sensitive stomachs and can easily become blocked. Eating a high fiber diet with lots of hay, slowly introducing new foods, daily exercise that keeps the gut moving, and making sure they are not eating their bedding or any plastic chewed off their toys or cage are all ways to prevent GI stasis from occurring. If your chinchilla shows any signs of having a blocked gastrointestinal system take them to the vet immediately as this can be deadly. *Symptoms include not eating, not drinking, not defecating, small, stringy, or misshapen droppings, lethargy, or hunching over in a secluded area.*

Heatstroke

Due to their thick coat, chinchillas are extremely sensitive to heat and humidity. Do not keep chinchillas anywhere where the temperature reaches 80° F because this can cause heatstroke and potentially death. If they seem to be getting too warm, put a granite or tile slab in the freezer, then place it in the cage for your pet to lay on to cool down. *Symptoms include panting, gasping, open mouth breathing, lethargy, high body temperature, and coma.*



BEHAVIOR

All chinchillas sound and act a little differently. Only by spending time with them will you fully be able to understand them. Below is a general guide of their communication to get you started.

VOCALIZATION

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
Barking	A harsh, loud “yap.”	<i>Sounding the alarm.</i>
Alarm Calling	Piercing, high-pitched squeal, or squeak.	<i>Fear or pain.</i>
Contact Calling	Grunts or hoots.	<i>Playful, curious, and/or relaxed.</i>
Exploratory Calling	Soft chirps.	<i>Contentment and/or announcing their presence.</i>

BODY LANGUAGE

BEHAVIOR	DESCRIPTION	MEANING
Flopping	Intentionally collapsing down on their side.	<i>Comfortable, relaxed.</i>
Freezing	Suddenly stopping and holding still.	<i>Startled or frightened.</i>
Binkyng	Hopping, bouncing, leaping, and running.	<i>Happy and having fun.</i>
Sneezing	Wiping something imaginary off with their front paws.	<i>Embarrassed.</i>
Urine Spraying	Urinating on or at someone.	<i>A defense mechanism that shows the animal is afraid and trying to escape.</i>
Fur Slip	Shedding a chunk of fur.	<i>A defense mechanism that shows the animal is afraid and trying to escape.</i>
Biting	Nipping.	<i>“Stop it,” “Go away,” or, “Put me down!”</i>
Shoving	Using the front paws to push people or objects away.	<i>“Stop it,” “Go away,” or, “Put me down!”</i>



CHINCHILLA SUPPLY CHECKLIST

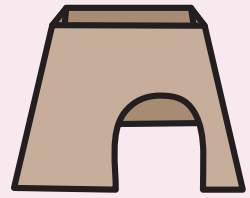
CAGE

6 cubic feet per chinchilla minimum.



SHELTER

Chinchillas like to hide in shelters when they are nervous or relaxing. Wood or grass huts, cardboard boxes, etc.



WATER BOTTLE



FOOD

Timothy pellets and timothy hay, orchard grass, or meadow hay.



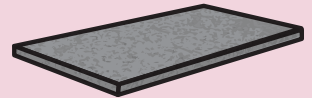
FOOD DISH

Ceramic is best to prevent chewing.



CHINCHILLER

Granite slab for cooling.



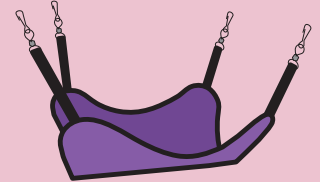
BEDDING

Anti-pill fleece.



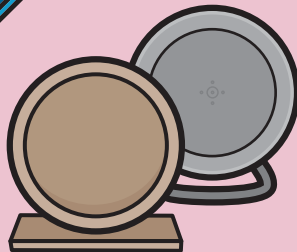
HAMMOCKS

Chinchillas love hammocks! Monitor for chewing.



WHEEL

Solid base only. No wire, bars, or mesh. Wood or solid metal base is ideal.



BED

Many pocket pets enjoy relaxing in a cozy bed such as a dog or cat bed, a small animal bed, or extra fleece. Monitor for chewing.



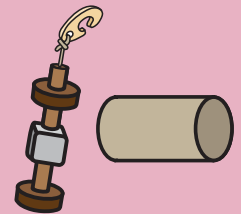
CHEW TOYS

Wood, lava, etc.



ENRICHMENT

Chinchillas are busybodies! Be sure to provide them with lots of fun toys. Check out our homemade toys page for ideas.



DUST

Make sure to get volcanic dust, not sand.

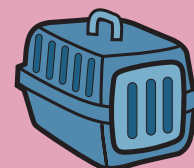


DUST BATH

You can purchase a ceramic dust bath or use a sturdy bowl.



PET CARRIER



DISCLAIMER AND CREDITS

DISCLAIMER

All information shared by MN Pocket Pet Rescue is researched, up to date, and accurate to the best of our ability. We are not a licensed veterinary organization and do not intend to present ourselves as such. All educational material contains our best recommendations for care specific to each species. However, all animals are different and some may have unique needs. MN Pocket Pet Rescue does not assume any liability for the well-being of any animal not under our care. Always use your best judgment and follow veterinary recommendations whenever necessary. If you have any questions or find inaccurate information please contact us.

CREDITS

Table of Contents

© Can Stock Photo Inc. / ivantagan

Housing

© Can Stock Photo Inc. / cynoclub

Feeding

© Can Stock Photo Inc. / IgorKovalchuk

Exercise & Social

© Can Stock Photo Inc. / ivantagan

**All illustrations by Burpingcake (Ash Russell)*

