



**ANIMAL CARE AND WELL-BEING  
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:**

## **GUINEA PIG (CAVY)**



**Q. Why do guinea pigs hide in the hut so much?**

**A.** Guinea pigs, also known as *cavies*, are a *prey* species. This means they have natural enemies (called *predators*) that hunt them. Guinea pigs hide to avoid being hunted, even when no predators are around. Naturally timid animals, they may sometimes find the fair a scary experience. Hiding in the hut helps them feel safe and protected.

**Q. Why do some cavies have colored water?**

**A.** Guinea pigs naturally don't have enough Vitamin C, so the vitamin needs to be included in their diets. Their pelleted food contains Vitamin C, but some people may give more to their cavies by mixing a little orange juice in their water, giving it color.

**Q. Why do cavies live alone?**

**A.** Guinea pigs prefer to have another guinea pig to live with, but that might not always be possible. Two cavies that don't know each other might fight and could hurt each other. Just as some people do not get along and cannot share a room, not all guinea pigs can share a cage with another animal. Although having guinea pigs live together is recommended, sometimes they need to live alone so they stay healthy and safe.

**Q. Why do they have things to chew in the cage?**

**A.** Guinea pigs are members of the rodent family, so like mice and rats, their front teeth constantly grow. They need things to chew on to wear down their teeth and keep them from biting the insides of their mouths, which could become infected and make them sick.



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### Q. Why do cavies make so many sounds? What do they mean?

**A.** Guinea pigs use sounds to communicate to other guinea pigs, animals and humans. They make many different sounds including a “wheek” when they ask for food, a purring sound when content and a growl when scared. Cavies also chatter when angry or upset. Listening to a guinea pig and watching its behavior as it makes these sounds will help you to understand the animal and its needs better.

### Q. How can you tell if your guinea pig is sick?

**A.** It can be hard to tell if cavies are sick because they are *prey* animals, which means other animals called *predators* hunt them for food. If they were in the wild and showed signs of being sick or injured, *predators* would quickly locate them. By watching carefully and knowing how a guinea pig normally behaves, you will learn to tell if it is sick. A sick guinea pig might stop eating, have fewer or no *fecal* (poop) droppings, be less active or interactive, or display a change in posture. If something seems off or different about a guinea pig, take it to a veterinarian right away.

### Q. Why do some guinea pigs have red eyes? Are they hurt?

**A.** Cavies with red eyes and white fur are *albino* guinea pigs – they are not bleeding or hurt. Albino animals lack *melanin*, a substance that gives living things different colors. All animals have melanin, including humans. It determines skin, eye, hair and fur color. Lacking melanin is normal but rarely happens in most wild animals.

### Q. What do you do with cavies?

**A.** Here in the U.S., cavies are primarily pets. A guinea pig is a *pocket pet* (any small animal kept as a pet that is easy to care for and does not take up a lot of space). In other parts of the world, guinea pigs are raised for meat.

### Q. Why do guinea pigs need hay?

**A.** Hay is a high-fiber food and cavies need a lot of fiber in their diet to stay healthy. Also, chewing on the hay helps to wear down teeth in a natural way.

### Q. Why don't cavies have places to climb?

**A.** Guinea pigs do like to climb, but great care must be taken in giving them a climbing surface. If they fell, their delicate leg bones could easily become hurt. The cages used at fair may not offer enough space or the appropriate space for them to climb, so they stay safe by being on a flat surface.



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