

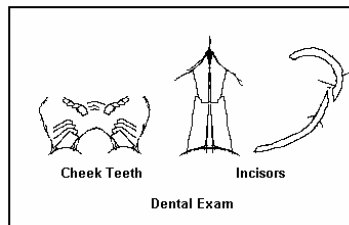
GUINEA PIG HEALTH CARE

Dental Disease

Dental disease (malocclusion) usually occurs in older guinea pigs (2-3 years of age). However, the lack of the proper amount of vitamin C in the diet can result in malocclusion at an earlier age (see section on Hypovitaminosis C). Finally, trauma can be another reason for malocclusion.

Molar malocclusion leads to abnormal wear and sharp painful points on the teeth. The lower teeth angle medially and if the alignment is not correct they can grow into an arch that entraps the tongue. The upper teeth angle outward toward the cheek and over-growth causes spurs that puncture the cheek mucosa. Affected guinea pigs will

exhibit reduced appetite, weight loss, drooling, inability to hold food (picks up the food and then drops it), and other signs of pain.



Incisor malocclusion can also occur with similar signs. However, please note that the normal length of the lower incisors is 3 times the length of the upper incisors.

If your guinea pig is

exhibiting any of the signs listed above, we recommend you see your vet

immediately. Treatment of malocclusion usually requires trimming the affected teeth under anesthesia as well as antibiotics, pain relief, fluids and nutritional support. There is no permanent solution for this problem. Regular rechecks are required to prevent reoccurrence and periodic trimming is usually necessary.

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Special points of interest:

- Guinea Pigs require supplemental Vitamin C.
- Guinea pigs exhibiting anorexia, weight loss, reduction in stool volume and numbers, and abdominal pain should be seen by your veterinarian **immediately.**
- Never attempt to treat your guinea pig at home without first consulting your veterinarian.
- Guinea pigs should be kept separate from rabbits and dogs.

Hypovitaminosis C

As discussed in the section on diet, guinea pigs require supplemented Vitamin C. Hypovitaminosis C (Scurvy) is common in guinea pigs due to this fact. Signs of hypovitaminosis C include bleeding, swollen joints, poor hair coat, lameness,

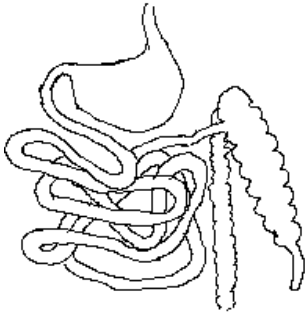
anorexia, delayed wound healing, secondary infections, and diarrhea. Hypovitaminosis C predisposes the guinea pig to molar malocclusion as the teeth loosen and shift. Refer to the section on dental disease for the discussion of

molar malocclusion.

Treatment of hypovitaminosis C involves supplemental vitamin C, antibiotics, pain relief, fluids, and nutritional support.

Loss Of Appetite

A guinea pig will lose its appetite for a variety of reasons. The most common cause is pain. While dental disease (discussed separately) and gastro-intestinal (GI) disease are the most common causes of pain, pain anywhere in the body can be associated with loss of appetite (anorexia). Other conditions that can lead to anorexia include bladder and kidney infections, uterine infections, abscesses, respiratory infections, inner and middle ear infections, strokes, parasitic diseases, and toxin exposure.



The problem is primarily a GI motility disorder, which is common in all of the hindgut fermenters. A high fiber diet is essential to the health of the GI tract. A low fiber diet, small particle diet (pellets as an exclusive diet), excessive carbohydrates (fruits, nuts, and grains),

reduced water intake, lack of exercise, or any medical condition that causes the guinea pig to eat or drink less may result in reduced motility of the GI tract. When this happens, the stomach contents start to dehydrate and compact. Reduced GI motility also leads to accumulation of gas and toxins and can start to compromise the blood flow to the intestinal tract. The less the guinea pig eats or drinks, the more compacted the contents become until the guinea pig stops eating entirely. When the guinea pig stops eating, the intestinal tract stops moving and the problem escalates.

Since guinea pigs cannot vomit, affected guinea pigs will exhibit anorexia, weight loss, reduction in stool volume and numbers, and abdominal pain. A guinea pig with these signs should be seen by your veterinarian **immediately**. Guinea pigs will deteriorate rapidly when they go without food for extended periods of time. Early diagnosis and treatment is essential to saving your pet's life.

Your veterinarian may require radiographs and blood work to efficiently evaluate the guinea pig's condition. Medical therapy may include fluid therapy, forced feedings, medications to stimulate GI motility, and pain relief. Depending on the severity of the disease, your guinea pig may need to stay in the hospital for treatments until its condition is stabilized.

A low fiber diet, small particle diet (pellets as an exclusive diet), excessive carbohydrates (fruits, nuts, and grains), reduced water intake, lack of exercise, or any medical condition that causes the guinea pig to eat or drink less may result in reduced motility of the GI tract.

Reproductive Diseases

Dystocia (difficult birth) is common in guinea pigs when their first pregnancy begins after 6 months. Guinea pigs have an open pubic symphysis until they reach 6-7 months old. After that, the symphysis fuses making the birth canal too small for parturition (birth). If this happens a cesarean section will be required.

Overweight females are highly susceptible to another disorder called

pregnancy toxemia. Sows that are overweight and suddenly stop eating will develop ketoacidosis as they start to metabolize fats instead of proteins. Affected sows will have an acute onset of severe depression progressing to convulsions and death.

Treatment includes intensive therapy with intravenous fluids, steroids, and supportive care. Unfortunately, the prognosis for recovery is grave.

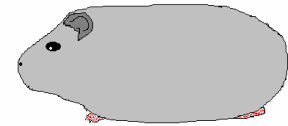
Finally, intact female guinea pigs can develop cystic ovaries. Breeding sows show a decline in fertility. Non-breeding sows present with hair loss on both sides of the lower half of the body. Also, the abdomen appears larger than normal. Diagnosis is usually made at the time of presentation. Spaying the guinea pig is the treatment of choice.

Bladder Stones

The color of a guinea pig's urine can vary from clear, yellow to reddish-orange or cloudy to almost white. These changes in color are due to pigments in the urine, called porphyrin, and calcium precipitate. The amount of calcium in the urine directly relates to the amount of calcium in the diet. Guinea pigs on high calcium diets such as alfalfa pellets and alfalfa hay can develop bladder or kidney stones.

Affected guinea pigs exhibit vague signs of pain, such as not eating, or blood in

the urine. Radiographs are necessary to make a diagnosis. Surgical removal is required if the stone is in the bladder. Prognosis is considerably poorer if the kidneys are affected. Reoccurrence is common. However, reducing the amount of calcium in the diet may be beneficial. Antibiotics are usually necessary since a bacterial infection in the bladder is commonly associated with urolithiasis (bladder stone).



Upper Respiratory Infections

Pneumonia and other respiratory infections, caused by *Bordatella* or *Streptococcus*, are common in guinea pigs. Rabbits and dogs are subclinical carriers of *Bordatella* and should not have contact with guinea pigs. Clinical signs include ocular or nasal discharge, sneezing, wheezing, dyspnea (difficulty breathing), anorexia, and pyrexia (fever).

Occasionally, middle or inner ear

infections accompany respiratory disease in guinea pigs. Additional signs would include incoordination, head tilt, circling to one side, and rolling. Your veterinarian may require blood work and/or radiographs to fully evaluate the condition of your guinea pig. Treatment includes aggressive antibiotic therapy and supportive care.

Rabbits and dogs are subclinical carriers of *Bordatella* and should not have contact with guinea pigs.

Hair Loss

Hair loss or thinning can occur for a number of reasons. Barbering (one guinea pig chews the hair of another guinea pig that is lower in the social pecking order), skin parasites, fungal infections, and cystic ovaries (discussed in section on reproductive disorders) can all cause hair loss in guinea pigs. The only "treatment" for barbering is to separate the guinea pigs.

Skin parasites, including mites and lice, are common in guinea pigs. They are easily diagnosed by direct visualization or skin scrapings. However, pruritic (itchy) guinea pigs with negative skin scrapings should receive a treatment trial for parasites prior to more extensive diagnostics.

Fungal infections, such as ringworm, can

also occur in guinea pigs. They present with similar signs of hair loss and pruritis. Ringworm is diagnosed by culture and treated with oral antifungals.

All litter should be discarded and all bedding and furniture should be thoroughly cleaned weekly during treatment for parasite and fungal infections.



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Our Mission

All Creatures Animal Hospital is dedicated to providing progressive medicine in a caring environment for pets of all species. Through preventative medicine, client education, professional development of our staff, and advanced medical and surgical techniques, we hope to foster a strong and lasting bond with clients and their pets.

Antibiotic Associated Intestinal Disease

Guinea pigs are very sensitive to certain types of antibiotics. For this reason, never attempt to treat your guinea pig at home without prior consultation with your veterinarian. Many antibiotics which are safe for other animals can be lethal to guinea pigs.

The primary mechanism behind this lethal effect is a dramatic alteration of the normal bacterial flora in the gastrointestinal tract. In addition to affecting the bacteria causing the illness, they also interfere with the normal

beneficial bacterial flora in the guinea pigs digestive tract. Disrupting the normal bacterial balance in the gastrointestinal tract results in the production of harmful chemicals. These chemicals (toxins) build up in the guinea pigs body leading to serious illness or death.

Never attempt to treat your guinea pig at home without first consulting your veterinarian.