



Chinchillas

Chinchillas are generally timid and very sensitive to rough handling so they're not suitable pets for young children but can make rewarding pets for adults and older children. Chinchillas are largely nocturnal so they sleep during the day and become active in the evening and at night – so you need to be able to stay up late enough to watch them! Chinchillas are intelligent and inquisitive, so with plenty of time, care and attention, they can become friendly. Keeping chinchillas as pets is a long-term commitment as they can live between from 10-20 years.

We need company

Chinchillas are social animals, so they're usually happiest when they have at least one other compatible chinchilla for company. Chinchillas may be kept in same sex pairs or groups, or a neutered male can be kept with one or more females. Buy or rehome an established pair or group at the same time as they'll already be friends – it can be difficult to introduce chinchillas to one another later on. Check them daily to make sure they are getting on. Chinchillas can also enjoy human company so provide them with rewarding interactions with you every day.

Where do we need to live?

Chinchillas need a home consisting of a large, multi-level cage and a secure exercise area, as they are very active. A secure, wire mesh cage with plenty of horizontal and vertical space will allow you to add solid platforms and branches at different levels so your chinchillas can jump around and explore. There should be no uninterrupted heights of more than 60cm, or they may hurt themselves if they fall. If your cage has a wire mesh floor, provide areas of solid flooring, or your pets may get sore feet from resting for long periods on wire mesh. Provide enough nest boxes for each chinchilla to rest in, hide from things that scare them or avoid their companions. Make sure that one nest box is large enough for them to rest together if they want to, though. Fill these with hay bedding. Locate your chinchillas' cage in a quiet, dry and well-ventilated area away from other pets, direct sunlight, radiators or draughts.

Chinchillas don't like high temperatures and can suffer from heat stroke, which can be very serious. Chinchillas should be allowed out of their cages in the evenings or at night, when they are most active, into a safe and secure exercise area. This could be a dedicated chinchilla room in which their cage is located or a large secure playpen (with a roof). You could even modify the

cage yourself to permanently attach an external exercise run in order to provide free access for your chinchillas.

Chinchillas are highly destructive, so exercise areas must be chinchilla-proofed – remove any household plants, cover or remove any electrical wiring, and protect or remove any items or areas you do not want to be chewed! It must also be well away from other pets, hazard-free and very secure to prevent escape (remember, chinchillas can reach high places and squeeze into small spaces). Fill the exercise area with plenty of tubes, boxes, tunnels, platforms and wooden toys for your chinchillas to hide in, explore, jump on and chew.

What do we eat?

Chinchillas need lots of fibre in their diet. Hay is high in fibre and forms the majority of your chinchillas' diet. A supply of good quality, fresh, dust-free hay should always be available for your pets – a hay rack is a good way to provide it. Hay maintains healthy digestion and helps to wear chinchillas' teeth down, preventing them from growing too long or becoming misaligned. A portion of good quality chinchilla pellets (one to two small tablespoons) can also be fed to supplement your chinchillas' diet. Whilst in our care, we feed them Pets at Home chinchilla pellets and recommend that you continue to do so – this will help to minimise stress and stomach upsets caused by a change of food at the same time as moving to a new home. If you wish to change their diet, introduce the new food slowly over a period of about 10-14 days, phasing out the old food completely. This gradual introduction will allow their digestive system to become accustomed to the new food.

Treats

Chinchillas enjoy treats, but these must be low in sugar and fats, as too much of the wrong foods can cause illness or weight gain. Dried fruit, root vegetables, leafy greens and cereal can be given occasionally in very small quantities. Avoid nuts and seeds as these are high in fat. Provide fresh water daily in a suitable bottle. Clean and fill food bowls, hay racks and water bottles daily

What do we need to do?

Chinchillas are very active and can easily get bored if they have nothing to do. Provide branches, shelves and hiding places, such as boxes, tubes and tunnels, around your chinchillas' home so they can jump around, explore, avoid their companions, rest and hide. Hiding nuggets or healthy treats around their home will stimulate natural foraging behaviour. Chinchillas love to chew, so also provide plenty of wooden gnawing blocks or natural willow toys. Chinchillas can develop behaviour problems if they are stressed or their needs are not being met. Speak to your vet if you are worried about your chinchillas' behaviour. How to handle us

Handling

When you first take your chinchillas home, give them a day or two to get used to their new surroundings without being disturbed, but check them regularly to make sure that they are all behaving normally and have everything that they need. Chinchillas do not generally enjoy being

handled, so it's always best to interact with them on their own terms at ground level. Sit quietly in your chinchillas' exercise area and offer them healthy treats when they approach. Plenty of time and patience will be needed to allow your chinchillas to get to know you and become comfortable with gentle handling. Start by talking to them quietly so they get to know your voice, and offer them healthy treats so they begin to associate you with pleasant experiences.

Over time, you may be able to stroke them and gently pick them up but don't force them. If you have to handle your chinchillas, use both hands – one hand gently under the chest and the other supporting the back and bottom. Hold your pet close to your chest and facing you, with one hand over his/her back and one hand supporting his/her bottom, firmly but gently. Chinchillas are sensitive to rough handling and may bite if handled incorrectly. If your chinchillas start to shed chunks of their coats, this is a sign that they're distressed. Handling is best done by adults to avoid stress or injury and in the evening when they are naturally awake. Hold them individually, over a table and away from things that they can try and jump onto, risking injuring themselves. Children must be closely supervised

Keeping us clean

Remove damp bedding or nesting material and replace with fresh materials daily, and sweep their cage and exercise area clear of droppings (they produce lots!). Clean the entire cage thoroughly at least once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant. Cleaning can be stressful for chinchillas as it removes familiar scents, so replace some used but unsoiled bedding and nesting material into the cage after cleaning, so some familiar scent remains.

Keeping us fit and healthy

Check your chinchillas over regularly and take them to your vet for a thorough health check at least once a year. See your vet immediately if any of your chinchillas are showing signs of pain, injury or illness (e.g. diarrhoea, runny eyes or nose, a damp mouth, matted fur, loss of fur, reduced eating or drinking, or changes in behaviour). Chinchillas need to have access to a dust bath every day to keep their fur in good condition. Provide a shallow tray filled with special chinchilla dust – your chinchillas will love rolling around in this to keep their soft fur clean. This should be removed or sieved clean after use as they may use it as a toilet.

Chinchillas' teeth grow constantly so hay and wooden gnawing toys should always be available for them as they help to wear their teeth down. Check your chinchillas' teeth regularly and visit your vet if you are concerned.

Settling in

One of the most stressful times for small animals is when they move house. Small pets can carry diseases that can be triggered when moving. Transport your pets carefully in a secure carrier. Put something familiar smelling in the carrier and in their new home. Always make sure that new pets are allowed to settle in for a few days before playing with them or disturbing them so that they are rested and feel secure in their new home. Check them regularly during this time to make sure they have everything they need and are behaving normally. If your new pet shows

any signs of being unwell after purchase, please contact the store, and we may arrange for him/her to see our vet.

Health and hygiene

All pets can carry diseases, some of which can pass to people. Always clean your hands with soap and water after handling or feeding your pets, or cleaning their home and equipment and ensure children do the same. Always supervise children to ensure they do not put pets (or objects that pets have been in contact with) near their mouths. It is best to avoid kissing your pet. Children under 5, pregnant women, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems should pay extra attention to hygiene when feeding, handling or cleaning out pets, their housing and accessories. Do not clean pet equipment with your normal washing-up liquid.

If you are thinking of looking after chinchillas, you've really researched their welfare needs and you're committed to taking care of them for the whole of their lives, please think about giving a home to some of the many rescue chinchillas available for adoption at RSPCA animal centres across England and Wales, in our Adoption centres in store, or with other animal charities.

Are Chinchillas the right pet for you?

Who are the chinchillas for?

Chinchillas are usually only awake in the evening and at night, and they generally dislike being handled so they may make better pets for adults. If children look after them, an adult must be responsible for ensuring they are cared for properly every day.

What about the future?

Chinchillas are a long-term commitment and can live between 10 to 20 years. Think about whether you really will be able to continue caring for chinchillas should your circumstances change.

Do you have the time for chinchillas?

Caring for chinchillas takes time - they will need feeding, cleaning out and interaction with you every day. These tasks are best done in the evening when chinchillas are naturally awake to avoid disturbing their sleep.

Do you have the space for chinchillas?

Chinchillas need a very large cage and exercise area and must be kept away from other pets in a quiet place indoors. Chinchillas are highly destructive, and any areas where they exercise need to be protected to prevent damage. They can be messy and produce a lot of droppings daily, which need cleaning up.

Can you afford chinchillas?

Chinchillas are not cheap pets. Consider the cost of specialist housing, food, bedding, toys, holiday care and veterinary fees. What will you do when you go on holiday?

Chinchillas get stressed by travelling and new surroundings, so they would prefer to stay at home whilst you are away. You will need to find a trustworthy and competent person to visit your home to look after your chinchillas every day while you are away.

The five welfare needs

A good home - Your chinchilla needs a suitable place to live

A healthy diet - The right food for a healthy, balanced diet and fresh water on tap

Ways to stay happy - The chance to do the things chinchillas like to do, like jump and explore

The right company - Being with, or away from, other animals

Help to be healthy - Protection against pain, injury, suffering and diseases

Your happy chinchilla checklist

- Large chinchilla cage
- Exercise pen (with roof)
- Nest boxes
- Dust-free hay (for food and bedding)
- Hay rack
- Pets at Home chinchilla pellets
- Sturdy ceramic food bowl
- Water bottle
- Bottle brush
- Dust bath
- Chinchilla dust
- Large tubes, tunnels and wooden toys

- Gnawing sticks or chews
- Pet-safe disinfectant
- Book on chinchillas

Pets at Home

Visit your nearest pet care centre to pick up essentials for your chinchilla, or you can shop online at www.petsathome.com.

The Pets Foundation

Changes do happen, and if you can no longer care for a pet you've bought from us, please get in touch so we can try to rehome them. Never abandon your pet or let them loose in the wild.