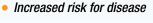


Why It Matters

Stress can have a significant impact on guinea pig health and welfare. Too much stress may cause:



- Digestive upset, resulting in diarrhea and weight loss
- Irritability and aggression, often leading to unwanted behaviors like ear nibbling and hair pulling

Minimizing Stress Helps Keep

• Depression and decreased activity

What Stresses a Guinea Pig

Guinea Pigs Healthy

of their environment and easily

stressors can make them anxious.

frightened. A wide variety of

- Sudden changes to their daily routine or to their environment, including housing, social groupings, water, food, or bedding
- Overcrowding or conflict within their social group
- No access to enclosed spaces to hide in
- Loud noises

- Sudden movements
- Other pets, especially dogs and catstheir presence alone is very stressful, as guinea pigs can feel threatened even if the other pet isn't harassing them
- Unfamiliar or unseen people nearby

PRACTICAL TIP

bored. Enrichment

can help redirect

this behavior.

Guinea pigs that spend a lot of time playing with their water source may be

Reducing Stress in Your Guinea Pigs' Environment

Avoid known stressors. House guinea pigs in a quiet area away from other pets or activity. Limit the number of animals in each enclosure to prevent overcrowding, and don't change their social groups too often. Follow a consistent routine for daily care.

Here are a few more things you can do:

- Offer shelters to hide in. Guinea pigs want to hide when feeling anxious or when startled by sudden movement.
- Make plenty of hay available throughout the day to encourage burrowing, foraging, and grazing. When guinea

pigs don't have enough forage material, they may show more aggression or anxiety-based behaviors such as fighting, biting, ear chewing, and compulsive hair eating.



- Give them items to chew on to relieve anxiety. Untreated wooden blocks are a good option that can be readily disposed of when worn or soiled.
- Avoid introducing new females to a group with lactating females or suckling young. Suckling sows are more likely to become aggressive toward unknown females.
- Offer many types of enrichment. Guinea pigs can become anxious and stressed just from boredom. Cardboard boxes, tunnels, and sheets of newspaper are some cost-effective enrichment options. Be sure to monitor the enrichment you provide and remove it if there are any signs of problems.
- Take it slowly when introducing anything new to their environment—whether it's a new food, new enrichment, or even a new guinea pig. Guinea pigs are wary of change!

This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to promote optimal guinea pig care and health.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov



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