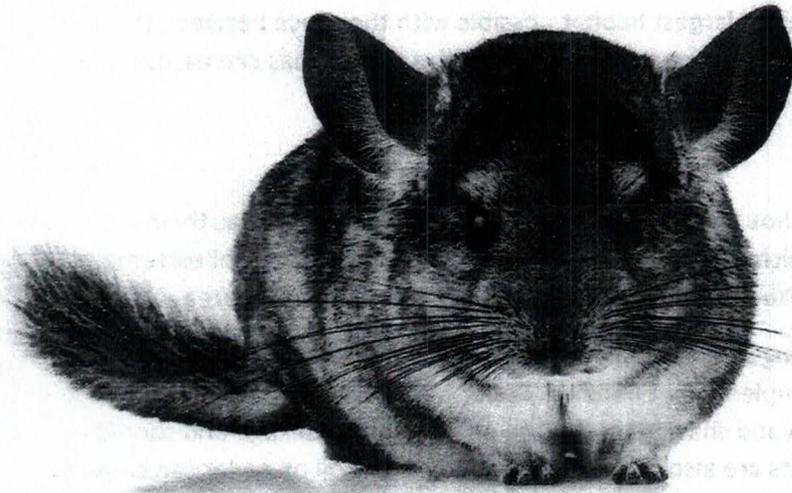


Chinchilla Care Sheet

chinchilla laniger



Chinchillas in nature can be found at elevations between 9 and 15 thousand feet along the rocky slopes of the Andes Mountains in western South America. These highly social cuties come in an array of colors, including gray, ebony, white, beige, violet and sapphire and make engaging companions. They have a wide range of vocalizations and can jump up to 5 feet.

Typical chinchilla appearance and behavior

- Chinchillas have an inquisitive and gentle nature and a lot of energy. They can be very shy if not socialized properly. A well-socialized chinchilla likes to be cuddled and carried.
- Chinchillas are crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk
- Chinchillas have very thick (approximately 60 hairs per follicle) and soft fur that will come out easily if they are restrained by their skin

Characteristics

Care Difficulty	Intermediate; good for pet parents who have time to socialize them and can handle them gently with great care
Average Life Span	Up to 10+ years with proper care
Average Adult Size	12 inches long
Diet	Herbivore
Minimum Habitat Size	Minimum floor space of 2' x 2' with as much height as possible for climbing; multiple levels are recommended

What to feed your chinchilla

A well-balanced chinchilla diet consists of:

- Clean, fresh, water, changed daily and provided in a small animal water bottle
- A limited amount (1-2 tablespoons/day) of high-quality chinchilla pellets and fresh vegetables with smaller amounts of fruits.
- Appropriate vegetables to offer chinchillas include deep leafy greens, carrot tops, squash and bell peppers
- Provide timothy hay or other low-calcium grass hay such as oat, meadow or orchard grass at all times as this makes up the majority of a chinchilla's diet. Hay provides fiber to the normal bacteria that live in chinchillas' gastrointestinal tracts to help them digest food properly
- Alfalfa hay should only be fed regularly to young, growing chinchillas or nursing mothers, as its high calcium content can lead to the development of bladder stones in adult, non-lactating chinchillas
- Occasionally, chinchillas may be offered a small amount of high-fiber treats such as commercially available chinchilla treats, a few unsweetened whole-grain Cheerios, a pinch of dry oatmeal or a couple of pieces of dry shredded wheat cereal. Treats should never exceed 10% of a chinchilla's diet
- Do not feed foods containing chocolate, caffeine or alcohol, as these are toxic and can lead to death. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats such as dried fruits, raisins, nuts, and seeds, as these items may upset the normal bacteria in chinchillas' gastrointestinal tracts and cause diarrhea and bloating

Things to remember when feeding your chinchilla:

- Hay and water should always be available
- A limited amount of pellets (1-2 tablespoons/day) plus vegetables and smaller amounts of fruits can be given daily but should not exceed 10% of their total diet
- Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded, as they are likely to spoil

Chinchilla care

- Chinchillas require dust baths a couple of times per week to help keep their fur clean and oil-free. Commercially available dust inside a dust bathhouse provides an excellent bathing area for chinchillas. Remove dust after 15-0 minutes Fur may be brushed with a soft brush
- Avoid getting your chinchilla wet, as it takes a long time for their thick fur to dry and underlying skin can become inflamed under damp fur
- Chinchillas are born with white teeth, but over time their teeth turn yellow as minerals such as calcium and iron deposit in their tooth enamel; this discoloration is normal, and cleaning is not necessary

- As chinchillas' teeth grow continuously, they must be supplied with wooden blocks, mineral chews or other wood toys to gnaw on to keep their teeth growth in check. As wooden sticks and branches from outside may contain parasites or fungus that is toxic to chinchillas, it is best not to offer them wood from outside but instead to provide commercially available, safe wooden toys on which they can chew
- Consult a veterinarian if a chinchilla's teeth seem too long, particularly if they are dropping food as they eat or they are salivating excessively
- Chinchillas have a very fragile rib cage and legs. Be gentle when handling them and do not squeeze their rib cage or hold them by their limbs

Habitat mates

- Chinchillas may be housed in same-sex groups or housed with opposite-sex partners if males are neutered (otherwise they will breed freely)
- Chinchillas should not be housed with other species of animals

Health

Signs of a healthy chinchilla

- Active, alert and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is unlabored
- Walks normally
- Fur around mouth and chin is clean and dry
- Nose free of discharge

Red flags (If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.)

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Lack of fecal pellets
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargy
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions

Habitat

Habitat size

A large, multitiered habitat with ramps and shelves to rest on is recommended because chinchillas love to jump, climb and play. A habitat with a minimum of 2'x2' of floor space should be provided. Wire habitats for optimal ventilation with a solid bottom are required to protect their feet from developing pressure sores on their soles. Provide the largest habitat possible with the space between the wires being no bigger than 1 inch. Plastic habitats are not recommended, as chinchillas can easily chew through them with their sharp teeth.

Building your habitat

Chinchillas acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F, as their thick coats make them prone to overheating, which could lead to fatal heatstroke. Be cautious of extreme temperature changes. Their habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.

- **Bedding** - 1-2 inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat. Proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding or crumbled paper bedding. Paper-based bedding is preferred, as it is digestible if eaten. Ingested wood shavings can cause an intestinal blockage and should be avoided. Cedar-based products are also not recommended, as the oil on cedar can cause skin and respiratory tract inflammation
- **Décor** - Chinchillas like to hide and should be provided with hiding places in their habitats to feel secure. Commercially available hide boxes, some of which are made of edible materials, are ideal for chinchillas to seek shelter in
- **Toys** - Chinchillas should have an exersaucer or solid wheel in their habitat in which to run to get exercise. Wheels should be solid inside to prevent tiny chinchilla toes and legs from becoming entrapped

Cleaning your chinchilla's habitat

Spot clean your chinchilla's habitat daily as needed to remove soiled bedding and leftover food. Damp, soiled bedding left in the habitat can lead to foot sores and inflammation and other health concerns. Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents completely at least once a week:

- Move your chinchilla to a separate, secure location
- Wash the habitat with a small animal habitat cleaner or 3% bleach solution
- Follow the habitat cleaner manufacturer's instructions or allow the bleach solution to remain in contact with the habitat and décor for 10 minutes before rinsing off to ensure proper disinfection
- Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing fresh bedding, dried décor and your chinchilla back into the habitat

Feeding

- Overgrown teeth
- Drooling or wet fur on chin
- Lameness/limping
- Loss of fur
- Bloated appearance

Common chinchilla health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stool caused by a low-fiber/high-carbohydrate diet, stress, gastrointestinal parasites, unclean housing or other illness.	Consult your veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Eye irritation/ discharge	From dust, bed shavings or infection.	Consult your veterinarian.
Heat stroke	An emergency condition. symptoms include heavy panting, collapse, seizures, loss of consciousness.	Can be fatal; consult your veterinarian immediately.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth; salivation; wetness on chin.	Consult your veterinarian to possibly have teeth trimmed regularly.
Mites	Patchy hair loss; itchy skin.	Consult your veterinarian for treatment.
Ringworm	Patchy hair loss; excessively dry and flaky skin Caused by skin infection with fungus.	Consult your veterinarian for treatment.

FAQs

- **How long do chinchillas live?** Chinchillas can live up to 10 or more years with proper care.
- **Are chinchillas good pets?** Chinchillas are good pets for pet parents who are looking for a pet to socialize and cuddle with, but who are also able to handle them gently to prevent injury to their delicate ribs and limbs.
- **Where do chinchillas live?** In nature, chinchillas are native to South America.
- **What does a chinchilla look like?** They are compact-bodied with large, upright ears, very thick soft fur and a brush-like tail.
- **Are chinchillas rodents?** Yes, chinchillas are part of the rodent family.
- **How big do chinchillas get?** Chinchillas can grow up to 12 inches long.