

Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

9330 Waldemar Road Indianapolis, IN 46268

www.exoticvetclinic.com (317) 879-8633



Care of Chinchillas

Introduction: Wild chinchillas originated from the Andes Mountains of South America and almost became extinct due to the popularity of pelts made from their coats in the early 1900's. Chinchillas weigh slightly over one pound, with females being slightly larger than males. The normal color is a blue-gray, but variations throughout the color spectrum are bred, with black being the most sought after. Average lifespan for a chinchilla in captivity is 10-12 years, though some can live up to 20.

Captivity Requirements: Chinchillas are active, needing lots of space to jump and climb. A cage should be taller than it is wide and can be constructed of a plastic or solid metal base with wire top. Any shelves in the cage should be solid, not wire. The minimum cage dimensions should be 2' x 2' x 3' tall for one chinchilla, keeping in mind that chinchillas should ideally be kept in groups. Originating from the Andes Mountains, chinchillas do very poorly in heat so temperatures should range from 60-70°F. Chinchillas should not be left unsupervised outside. The cage should be spot cleaned daily and thoroughly cleaned about once a week or as needed. Visual security is extremely important, as chinchillas are nocturnal and like to sleep during the day. This can be provided by a wooden hide box. Chinchillas can be housed in pairs or groups, but dominant females can become aggressive. Increasing cage size and the number of hide boxes is the starting point to solve this problem. Chinchillas should be provided with a dust bath to help maintain their fur. Commercial dust, which is a combination of silver sand and Fuller's earth, is available at most pet stores. Offer this multiple times a week in a pan deep enough to roll in and then remove after 30 minutes to avoid fecal contamination.

Diet: Chinchillas are herbivores, with grass hay making up 70% of the diet. Growing or lactating animals require alfalfa in addition to grass hay. The rest of the diet should be a high quality plain pellet. We recommend Chinchilla Deluxe pellets, made by Oxbow Pet Products (www.oxbowanimalhealth.com). This line of food can be purchased in some pet stores or at our clinic. Any changes in the diet should be done gradually over several days to a couple weeks to avoid digestive upset. Water should be made available at all times.

Diseases: It is always best to check with a qualified veterinarian when there are changes in your chinchilla's behavior or physical condition if you are unsure of the problem. We recommend weighing your pet weekly with a gram scale because often weight loss is one of the first signs of illness that owners can look for. Chinchillas should receive a physical examination at least once a year from a qualified veterinarian. Two common medical issues in chinchillas are dental disease and heart disease. Contact your veterinarian immediately if your pet develops exercise intolerance, inappetence, drooling, or pawing at the mouth.