

# GUINEA PIG WELLNESS

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A comprehensive guide to guinea pig medical care and advise.

**Introduction:** Guinea pigs are wonderful little animals. Guinea pigs are beautiful creatures that are lovable and kind. Guinea pigs are generally very healthy and it is only in times when they are unwell that they need and require our close attention so that they can get well again. Guinea pigs require veterinary care if unwell for certain conditions and this veterinary care is something every guinea pig owner needs to take into account. Below is a list of guinea pig illnesses and diseases that they can get and how to treat them. The guide will be a basic guinea pig wellness guide and for more comprehensive information you are welcome to message the author or contact us via the website.

**Illness 1: Respiratory infections.**

Guinea pigs are generally very hardy although at times throughout the year particularly when it is cold they may succumb to this illness. It is very easy to treat if caught early though if advanced vet care will be required. Guinea pig respiratory infections can cause death if left untreated appropriately. **Symptoms:** laboured breathing, sunken eyes, crustiness around the eyes and nose, weightloss. **Treatment:** Antibiotics (Baytril or Bactrim). Doxycycline may be required for more advanced stages of this illness. If caught early bringing your guinea pig indoors to a warm place making sure they have access to warmth is essential. Guinea pigs may also be supplemented with Vitamin C which will help to boost their immune system. Your guinea pig will also need and require fluids if they have stopped drinking. Fluids can be administered via a syringe which can be purchased at the chemist. A 1ml syringe will suffice. Guinea pigs that are unwell require close monitoring. Guinea pigs that have gone off their food may require syringe feeding. The best way to do this is to get your guinea pig pellets from food or some oatmeal and banana and mix with a little water to create a mush. A product called 'Critical care' is also available to purchase over the counter or online at pet supply stores or online which is a full feed supplement for sick and unwell guinea pigs. Chopping the end of the syringe off will assist you to feed the mushed food to your guinea pig. If your guinea pig has stopped eating completely they will require at least 25ml a day of this food mix.

## Illness 2: Fungal infections

Guinea pigs can succumb to fungal infections and these infections can be trying to treat although it is possible to clear the infections within a couple of weeks if dedicated to the medical regime and home care. Fungal infections can cause a lot of discomfort for guinea pigs and if left untreated can spread easily into the environment your guinea pig is living in alongside all over the body. Fungal spores can spread through the air so it is advised that you separate any guinea pig with an infection. **Symptoms:** Hairloss, white crustiness on your guinea pigs coat and skin, flakey skin, itching, weightloss in severe cases due to distress. **Treatment:** A medicated wash specifically for fungal conditions. 'Malaseb' is an over the counter treatment at vets and online that you can wash your guinea pig in to treat this condition bathing your guinea pig in the wash a couple of times a week and making sure that the bedding they are on is clean and kept clean throughout the process. Housing your guinea pigs on towelling or similar throughout the course of treatment is advised. Antibiotics are on occasion given in extreme cases. The environment must remain sterile throughout treatment and any bedding disposed of in a manner where it will bring least risk to other animals health. Towelling and similar require washing in a disinfectant to prevent further spread of spores.

## Illness 3: Back teeth overgrowth.

Guinea pigs have lots of teeth and these teeth need to be constantly trimmed down. Guinea pigs back teeth grow constantly and as a result they require fresh hay or grass in constant supply. Guinea pigs can sometimes have a genetic issue with the teeth and sometimes it is diet related. **Symptoms:** loss of weight, not being able to eat or chewing small bits of food only,

sunken eyes in cases that have continued without treatment due to dehydration and not eating, vitamin deficiencies, bones sticking out from weightloss. No other obvious symptoms of anything else. **Treatment:** Seek veterinary attention if the condition does not resolve over a couple of days the longer a guinea pig goes without food means that they run the risk of organ failure from not eating. The vet will usually trim the teeth short again using a medical device specifically for this. At home you can syringe feed the guinea pig water and also food by making a mush with vegetables and pellets and other things mixed with water. A 1ml syringe is the best suited to home feeding and cutting the tip off it so the mush can go up it. Guinea pigs require at least 25ml of the mush plus fluids whilst unable to eat properly.

## Illness 4: Bumblefoot.

Guinea pigs that are kept on clean soft bedding tend to not run the risk as much basically bumblefoot is a known condition that can cause the guinea pig a great deal of pain. The foot basically first becomes a bit red. If the condition progresses the foot will begin to have little sores on it and then the sores grow larger and don't heal. The condition is often caused by poor hygiene so the guinea pig is walking on bacteria and other matter which gets into the foot via a small wound. **Symptoms:** Inflammation, Sores that do not heal by themselves, obvious pain, swelling of the foot, loss of circulation in the foot, redness of the skin in the early stages, pus coming from the site in some cases. **Treatment:** If caught early the guinea pig can have antibiotic creams or similar applied to the foot area. Something to soothe the area is also recommended such as paw paw ointment or aloe vera gel. Soft bedding that is clean and sterile is given during treatment. Antibiotics such as Baytril from your vet can assist in healing and clear bacterial issues. In mild cases home treatment can be successful with creams applied to the site. In severe cases bandaging may be required so that the foot does not continue to have bacteria enter the site. The condition can continue on for weeks until full healing is noticed. Anti-fungal creams may assist. The best creams to use are anti-bacterial creams safe for application to the guinea pigs foot alongside healing creams that will aim to soothe. In severe cases if the condition spreads up the leg amputation may be the only option. Dedication to treatment is a must and treatment must be applied daily. Sometimes the condition will heal itself in mild cases with an appropriate diet given and clean bedding. Guinea pigs with this condition often are sensitive to touch in the area. Some creams made for horses can be very affective and sprays. Cleaning the site daily is recommended prior to application of anything. Recommended treatment at home can also include products such as betadine, colloidal silver, debridement spray or creams such as Debrisol. Natural and alternative treatments may assist.

## Illness 5: Vitamin C deficiency

Guinea pigs can suffer from scurvy just like people. The most obvious sign is a crusty flakiness around the eyes and the guinea pig may have a dull coat and hair thinning. Sometimes weightloss can be noted. **Symptoms:** flaky skin around eyes, weightloss, dull appearance, stiffness in back legs and unable to walk properly on back legs. **Treatment:** Vitamin C

supplements (human form is fine) given at 50-70mg over the course of a week or so. Supplements can be mixed with water and syringe given to be sure that the guinea pig is receiving the Vitamin C.

## Illness 6: Pregnancy toxemia

Guinea pigs on the occasion can suffer a rare scenario which is basically a condition known as toxemia. This condition only occurs in female guinea pigs that have just given birth or are just about to. The condition is basically failure of the liver and can be fatal. The sow will go off her food suddenly and become very lethargic and uninterested in anything e.g. hiding in the corner of the enclosure. The guinea pig will be noticeably unwell and will have a funny smell about them. The condition requires urgent treatment of the condition can be fatal. **Symptoms:** lethargy, odd smell, disinterest in life, hunching in corner of enclosure, unable to eat. **Treatment:** Fluids (given orally or intravenously at the vet), liver supplements. Possible hand-feeding if the guinea pig will not eat. Sometimes the guinea pig will require oxygen in severe cases.

## Illness 7: Urinary tract infections

Guinea pigs can sometimes come down with a UTI and although this isn't common usually the signs and symptoms can be a white substance excreted in the urine and also the guinea pig will make odd sounds whilst urinating or trying to urinate and often hunch up as they urinate. **Symptoms:** hunching whilst urinating, white substance in urine, squeaking whilst going to the toilet or appearing to have trouble going to the toilet. **Treatment:** Antibiotics (vet visit required).

## Illness 8: Bloat

On the occasion a guinea pig can suffer from bloat and this is not always because of diet although diet can contribute. Guinea pigs fed a lot of wet grass or high moisture grass can occasionally come down with this condition. **Symptoms:** Stomach distention, air or fluid build up in the stomach which can result in compression of the surrounding organs alongside disfunction. The guinea pig will appear to be larger around the area of the stomach and will go off food if the condition worsens. The condition can appear very quickly over approximately 24-48hrs and whilst tapping the side of the animal hollow sounds can be heard and externally the guinea pig will be hard around the area. **Treatment:** Fluids, removal of wet food for at least 48hrs. If the guinea pig is in obvious discomfort and unable to eat veterinary attention may be required to remove the excess wind and this is often successful.

## Illness 9: Tumors

Guinea pigs can get a number of benign tumors mostly. The tumors will appear on the skin and will be obvious. Like other animals tumors can grow and if your guinea pig shows a lump it is wise to monitor it. **Symptoms:** Lump anywhere on the body. **Treatment:** If proven benign the lump can be left if it is not affecting the animal or causes harm. If the lump grows and changes over the course of a short period of time veterinary attention may be required and surgery to remove the lump. Usually surgery is successful in the majority of cases. Monitor the lump and if no changes or growth then more than likely this is a non

harmful tumor or skin lump. Any obvious growth of the lump requires surgical removal. Any guinea pig that shows signs of skin lumps on the body it is recommended to opt for surgery. Usually the guinea pig will not lose condition and the lump will not appear to bring any discomfort unless it grows to a size that affects the animals circulation and other organs.

## Illness 10: Bladder stones

Guinea pigs can sometimes suffer from bladder stones. Male guinea pigs are more prone to this condition than females because their urinary tract is smaller and unable to pass stones with ease. Female guinea pigs and male guinea pigs can both be prone to stones and this is usually diet related. Adult guinea pigs must be on a diet that is not overly high in calcium because the excess calcium can build up. Guinea pigs usually urinate excess calcium and this appears as a white excretion from the urine and often a chalky substance is left behind. This can be obvious to the eye and seen in your guinea pigs bedding. Bladder stones often result after this in cases where they develop. **Symptoms:** Chalky like substance in urine, Mild squeaking whilst going to the toilet and hunching posture, noticable struggle whilst going to the toilet and unable to pass urine. **Treatment:** Veterinary care. Stones will appear on X-ray and are usually flushed out at the vet although in some cases this is unable to be done and they cannot be passed. In these cases the guinea pig will require further veterinary attention and surgery may be required to remove the stones. Guinea pigs with bladder stones must seek veterinary care or they will be unable to urinate leading to organ failure eventually. Bladder stones can occasionally dissolve without requiring surgery and small ones can pass in the urine without issues. Sometimes bladder stones require alternative options which have proven successful such as removing the source of excess calcium from the diet (lucerne hay for instance can be too high in calcium for adult guinea pigs), chinese medicines and other alternative options. It is worth seeking alternative options in the first few days of noticing the issue arise although if signs of distress are shown it is recommended to seek veterinary attention. Extra fluids can be given at home orally via Syringe (1ml syringe) to assist in flushing the area. Some stones can pass naturally in some cases. Giving fluids and alternative treatment for the first 24hrs or so to assist in the passing of small stones can be successful. Large stones always require surgical intervention or veterinary care.

## Illness 11: Clostridia

Guinea pigs rarely come down with a condition called Clostridia. This condition is known as an overgrowth of bad bacteria in the gut. The bad bacteria is basically like a sudden overload and the guinea pig requires swift attention. **Symptoms:** Sometimes none. Sudden death with no obvious sign. Stringy stools, loss of interest in food, sickly look. **Treatment:** Probiotics - given in large doses over a few days. Human probiotics are ok to use although small animal specific ones can be purchased from your local vet. Occasionally antibiotics.

## Illness 12: Coccidiosis

Guinea pigs can get coccidiosis and it is uncommon although it is easily treated and it is hard to eradicate spores from the environment though quite possible. Over the years guinea pigs have not had a huge issue with this illness although overall it does exist so is worth documenting. Coccidiosis comes from the environment and basically the animal gets infected by the spores. Spores are very hard to eradicate and often extreme heat is one way of doing so. Spores can also be eliminated by removal of the animal from the environment and then disinfecting the environment with heat, freezing or sterilising with chemicals known to eradicate spores this can include hospital grade disinfectants although in saying this they are not known to completely eliminate spores from the environment. After 6 months or so spores can be eliminated by nature

itself although in saying this they do not always go away in such a short time. Disinfectant alongside allowing used items to sit for lengths of time can mean elimination of spores.

**Symptoms:** Symptoms of coccidiosis include weightloss suddenly, loss of appetite, blood in feaces, severe hunger, increase in body temperature on occasion, complete withdrawel.

**Treatment:** Antibiotics (Doxycycline) alongside administration of Baycox which is a product that eliminates the disease if administered orally. A combination of home treatments such as offering large doses of probiotics alongside large doses of Vitamin C can assist in giving the infected animal a chance to fight the infection. Veterinary care is almost always necessary although sometimes animals recover by themselves. Animals showing severe symptoms require acute care.

## Illness 13: Eye infections

Guinea pigs can occasion get eye infections either by an accidental injury in their environment or by some other cause. Eye infections are generally treated easily at home using eye drops for people or animals. Alternatively for more severe infections antibiotics may require administration and also removal of the eye in severe cases.

**Symptoms:** Inflammation of the eye, redness, soreness, obvious bluish tinge in more severe infections. **Treatment:** Medicated eye drops from local chemist or online store. Veterinary care if required. Washing the eye with mild salty water and saline in between administering eye drops can assist in a quick recovery. Most guinea pigs recover in a short period of time only in severe cases would a guinea pig require surgery to remove the eye if the infection runs risk of spreading or has become severe.

## Rare illnesses:

Bowel obstruction

Internal blockage of intestinal tract

Abcess behind the eye

Malignant tumors or similar

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