



Minimizing Stress Helps Keep Guinea Pigs Healthy



As prey animals, guinea pigs are naturally wary of their environment and easily frightened. A wide variety of stressors can make them anxious.



Why It Matters

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

- **Increased risk for disease**
- **Irritability and aggression, often leading to unwanted behaviors like ear nibbling and hair pulling**
- **Digestive upset, resulting in diarrhea and weight loss**
- **Depression and decreased activity**



What Stresses a Guinea Pig

- **Sudden changes to their daily routine or to their environment, including housing, social groupings, water, food, or bedding**
- **Sudden movements**
- **Overcrowding or conflict within their social group**
- **Other pets, especially dogs and cats—their presence alone is very stressful, as guinea pigs can feel threatened even if the other pet isn't harassing them**
- **No access to enclosed spaces to hide in**
- **Loud noises**
- **Unfamiliar or unseen people nearby**

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!

PRACTICAL TIP



Guinea pigs that spend a lot of time playing with their water source may be bored. Enrichment can help redirect this behavior.

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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