As with all pets, Guinea Pigs should be checked daily for signs of illness. Regular handling will help you get to know your pet; you should become aware of what is normal for him or her.

**Parasites**

Parasites such as mites, lice, fleas and flies can affect your guinea pig. They can be transferred between Guinea Pigs and through their bedding. If you notice your Guinea Pig has a poor coat condition, is scratching or biting its fur and causing sore patches then this could indicate parasites. Apart from being very uncomfortable, if left untreated your pet can become unwell. It is important you contact us for advice if you see any of these signs. Treatment is available by administering an insecticide or insect repellent specifically for rodents. We can advise you of the best and safest product and if used as a preventative measure, can keep your Guinea Pig free from parasites.

**Teeth**

Guinea Pig’s teeth grow constantly, which is why it is important for them to eat a diet high in fibre. Overgrown teeth will be very uncomfortable and will cause signs of salivation, difficulty in eating or not eating and weight loss. Their front teeth (incisors) can be examined regularly at home. Their back teeth (molars) cannot be seen and will need to be checked by a vet if they show any of these signs. If you have any queries regarding your pet, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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**OPENING TIMES**

The practice is open during the times below. Our appointments run throughout the day, please ring and speak to a receptionist.

In the advent of an emergency outside of these times, ring 01376 325511 to speak to our vet on call.

**Braintree**

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Friday 8:00am - 8:00pm
Thursday 8:00am - 6:30pm
Saturday 8:00am - 1:00pm
t: 01376 325511

**Coggeshall**

Monday - Saturday 9:00am - 10:10am
Monday, Wednesday & Thursday 5:00pm - 6:10pm
t: 01376 561667
Our Guinea Pigs are a domestic version of wild Guinea Pigs originating in South America. For optimal health it is important to provide a diet similar to their wild relatives.

**Diet**

Dental and digestive disorders are common in Guinea Pigs and a poor diet is almost always to blame. Guinea Pigs need to eat a large amount of fibre. The best sources of fibre are grass and good quality fresh hay. Hay should be placed in a hayrack to prevent it from being trodden on and soiled. Guinea Pigs fed on commercial mixes tend to selectively feed and hence do not receive a balanced diet. For this reason we recommend all-in-one pellets which are rich in fibre and vitamin C e.g. Supreme Selective Guinea Pig or Burgess Supa Guinea Pig. Guinea Pigs need a diet rich in vitamin C as unlike rabbits, they cannot make it themselves. These pellets should be used only as a complementary diet and not the sole food source. Your guinea pig should be weighed regularly and you should use the feeding guide on the food bag. Guinea Pigs love weeds such as dandelion, groundsel, chickweed and clover. Apples, tomatoes, carrots, celery, cucumber and greens can also be on the menu and provide another good source of vitamin C. It is wise to avoid commercially prepared treats, as these are often high in sugars and fat, so try branches from apple and willow trees as a healthy treat and a great source of fibre! All these extras should only be given in small amounts. These are likely to be more tasty than hay and grass but it’s important the Guinea Pig is still hungry enough to eat their hay and grass. Like all animals they need fresh water each day.

**Housing**

Guinea Pigs can be kept outdoors or indoors. If outdoors they need a hutch which is draught, weather and vermin proof. Guinea Pigs are susceptible to temperature changes. During the colder months they require extra bedding and a protective cover over the hutch at night. In hot weather guinea pigs can suffer from heat stroke. They will mouth breath when they are overheated; if this happens contact us for advice. Heat stroke can be prevented by keeping the hutch in a shaded area and filling a plastic bottle with water, freezing it and placing it in their hutch so they can lean on it if they need to! Their hutch should be checked every day and should be cleaned out at least 1-2 times a week, especially during the warmer months. Space is important for any animal, so try to get the biggest hutch you can afford. Pets kept in hutches need environmental stimulus and exercise is important. Try hiding their food and give them bothholes to hide and play in. Give your Guinea Pig a secure run, ark or enclosure so they can graze. This should be portable enough to be moved frequently onto fresh areas of grass.

**Companionship**

Guinea Pigs are very sociable animals and most will become unhappy if living on their own. It is important for them to have a companion. The best pairing is usually a neutered male and 1 or 2 females. It is possible to keep 2 males together; provided they have been brought up together, but it is advisable to get them both neutered to reduce the risk of fighting. Guinea Pigs will live happily in groups but it is important to keep only one male, regardless of whether they have been neutered. Introducing adult Guinea Pigs should be done slowly and under supervision whilst they get to know each other. You should avoid pairing a Guinea Pig with a rabbit, as they are different species and require different care, including a different diet.

**Breeding**

It is advisable to bring your Guinea Pigs to us for a full check up, before breeding commences. They need to be in good health to produce healthy offspring. Overweight and underweight Guinea Pigs should not be bred from. Male Guinea Pigs become sexually active around 8-10 weeks old and females between 4-5 weeks. The female is pregnant for 65-72 days and the offspring are fully formed, eyes open and eating solid food within 24 hours, as well as feeding from their mum. Guinea Pigs can become pregnant as early as 12 weeks and alarmingly can become pregnant up to five times a year; even straight after giving birth! Guinea Pigs need to have their first litter before they are a year old. This is before their pelvis fuses, narrowing the birth canal. If their first litter is after this time they will have difficulty in giving birth and should not be bred from. Male Guinea Pigs can be castrated and for most pet owners wanting to keep male and female Guinea Pigs together this is the best advice. Guinea Pigs have a life expectancy of 4-7 years.