

Basic Chinchilla Health Issues

Questions about your pet chinchilla answered.

By Kevin Schargen

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Chinchilla Lilo/ © Courtesy Allie Lyth
Pet chinchillas usually weigh only 1 to 2 pounds.

Q: What's the average size of a chinchilla?

A: This perfectly packaged rodent weighs in at 1 to 2 pounds, with an overall length of a foot or so. Weigh your chinchilla on a gram scale at regular intervals throughout the year.

Knowing the animal's normal weight range allows you to monitor for possible unhealthy weight fluctuations that could alert you to disease.

Never rely on visual assessment — seeing your pet every day weakens your powers of noting change, and the animal's dense coat complicates the matter by obscuring its underlying body condition.

Q: How active is this rodent?

A: You need only examine the disproportionately long hind legs of a chinchilla to get an idea of its innate gymnastic ability. Cage size should reflect the animal's need to exercise this natural behavior — a consideration often overlooked in chinchilla housing.

To keep a chinchilla's naturally active body (and mind) in peak condition, daily out-of-cage exercise is essential. For in-cage aerobics, provide an extra large exercise wheel. Seek out an exercise wheel designed specifically for chinchillas. Substituting another type of wheel could cause injury.

Q: Do they suffer any other common medical problems?

A: Properly fed chinchillas are hearty, but several disorders must be considered. Internal parasites such as Giardia, dental problems (such as jaw misalignment and loose teeth), inflammation of the intestinal lining (which may cause diarrhea, mucus in the feces, vomiting and dehydration), heart murmurs and ringworm are some of the more common problems.

Proper nutrition, good sanitation and regular veterinary attention are important in preventing and controlling many of these maladies. Closely monitor your chinchilla's behavior, weight and bowel movements (which should be firm, small, rounded pellets of a dark-green to brown color), and report any abnormal changes to your veterinarian. The body temperature of a healthy chinchilla is around 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius).

Constant exposure to stress predisposes an animal to disease. Because chinchillas are naturally skittish animals, keep cage relocation, loud noises and diurnal disturbances to a minimum.

The chinchilla's teeth can be another health indicator. The natural color of a chinchilla's incisors is yellow-orange.