

Guinea Pig Suddenly Begins Biting People

Why would a previously sweet-tempered guinea pig suddenly start biting people?

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Q: My son has a guinea pig that we have had for three years. The guinea pig has always been super sweet and has never bitten anyone. However, a week ago he started biting. He has bitten me, my son and our babysitter. Do you know why this could be happening? Nothing has changed in our household.

A: There could be a couple things going on here. Sometimes guinea pigs can get a pinch in their backs or a sore spot in their spine that causes them to nip. To test for this, hold your guinea pig in your lap. Gently run your finger up the guinea pig's spine. If the guinea pig cries out at some point during your finger's journey, it may have a sore back that's causing it to bite. If this is the case, holding your guinea pig could cause it back pain and its only response is to bite. A visit to the veterinarian can confirm this condition.

Sometimes guinea pigs will bite to get their way. Bite, you put them down and they have gotten what they wanted — out of your arms and back to whatever they were doing. They are very smart and quick learners.

To modify behavior like this, gently blow one short puff in the guinea pig's nose when it bites. This causes the guinea pig to catch its breath. If you do this consistently, the guinea pig usually stops its biting behavior, perhaps even as quickly as the third air puff in its nose.

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