

Beware of Guinea Pig Bloat

Catch the signs of guinea pig bloat before it turns fatal.

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Image Courtesy Maria Sherman, VA
Guinea pig bloat is a serious, and sometimes fatal condition.

Guinea pig owners need to be wary of a serious, and sometimes fatal, condition known as guinea pig bloat. The bloat occurs when too much gas builds up in the intestinal tract resulting in distention of the stomach or cecum, but veterinarians cannot pinpoint one cause. Lack of appetite, hairball impaction, gut adhesions from past abdominal surgeries, bacteria, parasites, viruses or stress can all produce the onset of guinea pig bloat.

Signs of Guinea Pig Bloat

If you notice anorexia in your guinea pig or visible swelling around its rib cage, see a veterinarian immediately. Other signs that can be attributed to guinea pig bloat include general weakness, decreased production of stool, heavy breathing and restless movement. This condition can be very painful for your guinea pig and could worsen over night, so take action as soon as you observe any signs.

Treatment of Guinea Pig Bloat

Veterinarians can treat guinea pig bloat with anti-gas medications or antibiotics to get the gastrointestinal tract functioning normally. They can give the guinea pig pain medication and encourage the guinea pig to drink lots of water. If drug therapy proves futile, the vet might perform surgery. However, keep in mind that once a guinea pig has bloat, the condition is likely to happen again.

"The prognosis for guinea pigs with bloat is always guarded," said Lori Hageman, DVM, of The Ark Pet Hospital in Antioch, Calif. "There are many theories on the disease but nothing has been definitely proven."

Prevention of Guinea Pig Bloat

According to William Ridgeway, DVM, of Long Beach Animal Hospital in Long Beach, Calif., 10 to 20 percent of the guinea pigs he sees have bloat, but owners can take precautions against the condition. Veterinarians recommend feeding guinea pigs hay and other high fiber foods and making sure that the water and food dishes are clean. They also recommend monitoring the guinea pig's eating habits to catch anorexia at an early stage.