

## Before You Get A Pet Guinea Pig

**Consider these facts before you bring a pet guinea pig home.**

*By Audrey Pavia*

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Guinea pigs make great pets for people who can meet their needs. 1. Guinea pigs often live to be 7 years old, sometimes longer, so you must be prepared to care for your small pet for almost a decade.

2. Guinea pigs need a medium-sized cage and room to exercise. Soiled litter must be cleaned daily.

3. You must feed guinea pigs daily, and include fresh vegetables in their diet.

4. Guinea pigs are social animals, and should live with at least one other guinea pig. Solitary guinea pigs must be handled every day.

5. Guinea pigs can get sick and need veterinary care. You'll have to take your small pet to a veterinarian who specializes in exotic small animals.

6. Guinea pigs are rodents and are not allowed in some public housing units.

### Guinea Pig Versus Cavy

Cavy is another name for the genus *Cavia porcellus*, the guinea pig.

In Peru, where the guinea pig originates, the animal is called cuy. When these animals were first imported to Europe in the 1500s, they were given the name guinea pig, either because they cost a guinea to purchase, or because some of the small animals came from Guyana, a country in South America, and the name was mispronounced.

The word "pig" is a misnomer, since these small animals are not pigs but rodents. They may have received this part of their name because they resemble a pig in appearance.

The name "cavy" comes from the animal's scientific family name, Caviidae.