

**WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)**



# **WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)**

## **EVERYTHING A GUINEA PIG OWNER SHOULD KNOW**

**NO PIG LEFT BEHIND!**

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

## ***WHAT EVERY GUINEA PIG OWNER SHOULD KNOW***

*Please take the time to read this booklet. It is important that you as much as you can about them and their needs., their living quarters, their health and their diet. This booklet will help point you in the right direction.*

**OWNING GUINEA PIGS:** So, you've gotten a guinea pig (also known as cavy or piggies). There are a few things you should know to be a good cavy owner. First and foremost, be patient and do your homework. There's more to owning a guinea pig than just saying how cute they are and holding them every once in a while. They require love, gentleness, proper food, clean water, clean bedding, and friends, both furry and human. If you follow the guidelines set forth in this booklet, your new guinea pig(s) should live a long, healthy and very happy life. Having given you the speech that every new guinea pig owner should receive, let's get into the very basic information that is essential for the health and happiness of your guinea pig.

If you really love and care for your piggie, you'll make sure he/she has a friend of the same sex; or if you have one of each sex, one should be altered—preferably the male since neutering is much easier on the male than spaying is on the female; and the cost is much more affordable. Cavies are herd animals and social creatures by nature, and they get very lonely without a friend of their own to share their life with. If the guinea pig you received was with another pig, consider getting that pig as well. If there is no friend already with your chosen guinea pig, please make it your mission to find your new cavy a friend of his/her own. Their happiness will make you feel good about giving two of these great little creatures a home. Besides, if you are feeding one, it's not much more to feed two (or three).

When we lose a member of our family, we are sad and get very depressed. The same can be said of our furry friends. They become bonded to their cage mates, and when one passes, they, too, become very depressed. This depression can actually lead to the death of the other guinea pig. It's so sad to see a piggie sit in the back of their cage or crouching in their pigloo, just missing someone so much that they are just waiting for death to take them, too. That is why ALL of my own personal pigs have at least 2 other pigs, and usually 3 or more, with them at all times. Their happiness and health should always be your main concern. The reasoning behind having 3 cavy instead of 2 is that if one passes away, the other pigs already have a cage mate, making the depression less severe over their loss.

**INTRODUCING GUINEA PIGS TO EACH OTHER:** Unless they have previously been together and already know each other, two or three guinea pigs will need to be introduced to each other the first time they meet. This introduction is a critical phase for your piggies to get along and bond into a happy family. Done correctly, they will most likely be friends for life. There is always the possibility that two piggies may just never get along, but that is rare. Immediate friendship is also often illusive. As with humans, friendship is not something that is just automatically there, it has to be cultivated; trust being earned. The same can be said for guinea pigs. An introduction that ends with no one being hurt is always off to a good start. There are many methods of introductions and I will just list a few of the ones that I have used and know work.

It is best to introduce a new piggie to your cavy family in neutral settings, usually the floor.

The first method is to start out with one person holding one pig and a second person holding the other pig some distance apart, and then release them both, and let them "find" each other. I always like to have a big pile of hay in the middle. Friendships tend to form better over food. Don't we do the same? We go to dinner with someone because it's a neutral setting and a chance to get to know someone better without our own personal space being compromised. To obtain a neutral smell, some people put a little hand lotion on their hands and then pick up the pigs, so that they both "smell the same". There are 5 steps to this type of introduction. The first step is when they are let go to find each other. Then, once they are aware that there is another STRANGER in their area, they will each want to be the boss. They will start out by sniffing each other to check on the sex of the intruder. Males and females alike will both want dominance over the other cage mate. Step 3 is when they decide that they have to appear to be "bigger" than the other. They will yawn to show how big their teeth are; chatter their teeth; rumble strut (stomp from side to side in place, chattering their teeth); chase; and then mount each other. This dominance show can last from just a couple of minutes until more than an hour, or more. It is during this time that minor bite injuries may occur. **UNLESS THERE IS MAJOR ARTERIAL BLOOD LOSS OR DAMAGE, DO NOT SEPARATE THEM!** They are doing what guinea pigs do in their world. It looks brutal to us, but they know what they are doing. At this point, don't try to pet, touch or intervene.... You may be the one to get bitten. Your gentle little guy isn't himself at that time and

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

has very little clue as to his surroundings. The fourth step is when both piggies will lay down some distance apart from each other. It's at this point that they pretty much have worked out the hierarchy, but are just testing the waters. The fifth and final step is when they will move side by side, pointing in opposite directions. The intros are pretty much finished at this point and they can be put in a clean cage with lots of hay. They may do the dominance act again, but it should be much less severe, then they will settle down and start to get to know each other.

Another method should only be done by someone with experience handling guinea pigs, and is a little more gentle way to introduce piggies. First, I bathe the piggies that are being bonded together at the same time so that they can huddle together in the sink (minimal stress is a great bonding agent!). Using warm water and very smelly gentle shampoo, give each pig a bath, being careful not to get any water in their ears or up their nose. Dry them off with a dry towel; and make sure you have a second, big fluffy towel to finish drying them with. Then, with the larger dry towel folded in half, with the fold towards your chin, put both covies side by side, facing your chin on the towel. Fold the bottom half of the towel up, ensuring that they can't fall through the bottom of the towel. Then fold both the left and right sides of the towel over the piggies, swaddling them tightly. Hold them like this until they are just about dry. I just sit and hold them, giving both of them treats and just talking and stroking them. The stress turns to relaxation. It will take about an hour, but the piggies will start to get restless and move around. At that point, unwrap the towel and start to towel dry them to get them a little drier. After holding them for a while unwrapped, they should be more comfortable with each other and can then be put in a clean cage with lots of hay and left to get to know each other. As with the other method, unless there is serious bodily harm, do not separate them. This method usually works quite well. Also, using this method, if I am introducing males, I might throw in one more step just before I give them a bath. I check and clean their anal sacs with a Qtip.

The introduction process may work instantly, or may take several sessions. Patience is the key. The one thing you want to remember is that skirmishes are normal. As long as there is no MAJOR blood loss (we are talking arterial spray, large gaping wounds, eye wounds) DO NOT SEPARATE THEM!! This is the biggest mistake people make when trying to introduce pigs. Guinea pigs live in a hierarchical society. Someone must be boss, and trust me, just by us telling them who is in charge, doesn't work. They have to figure it out themselves. These minor skirmishes are their way of doing just that. It looks frightening to us, but they have been around for millions of years, doing things their way. The human stepping in because we are frightened with their skirmish won't help solve their "boss" problem.

**WARNING: PLEASE BE SURE YOU HAVE TWO SAME SEX GUINEA PIGS!** There are far too many unwanted guinea pigs in this world already. If you are having trouble sexing a guinea pig, please see your local veterinarian or vet tech. They can usually sex your guinea pig for little to no charge; or seek out a guinea pig rescue and ask them for help. You want to make sure you get same sex pigs or a spayed or neutered pig if you are going to put a male and female together. It is possible to have a guinea pig spayed and neutered, so even if they are of opposite sexes, don't let that stop you, just make sure that you keep them separated until 3 weeks after the neuter, but still close enough so that they can still see and talk to each other.

I can't tell you how many times over the years where I have had people say to me: "Someone told me you can't put 2 males together because they will fight and kill each other." Let me just say this: W R O N G! I have several cages where I have , 4 and even 5 intact males living together with no problem whatsoever! Sometimes you may have to get an aggressive male neutered to calm his raging hormones, especially if he has been around females, but it most definitely is possible to have several males together.

**MALES VS FEMALES:** The age old question, "*Should I get a male or female?*"

There are drawbacks to both sexes, so it all boils down to this: Male guinea pigs have very little "male" health issues to deal with. Their anal sac will need to be routinely cleaned of fuzz, bedding, hay and other debris that is picked up from the cage, as well as "smegma" which is a cottage cheese looking substance that is deposited in the penis area, under the sheath and in their anal sac. Cleaning the anal sac is a smelly process, but it is definitely necessary to prevent impaction.

The myth that females are more docile or gentler than a male is absolutely false. In fact, I have found the opposite to be true. My males are all much more settled than the females; and so much more affectionate. Females generally should not get spayed unless they have "female problems". Yes, believe it or not, they too, can have the need for a hysterectomy, but in their world it is called a spay. Signs that a spay are in order for a female pig are: an enlargement of the nipples, and a crusting around them, that is not from a dirty cage; the female may get "grumpy"; a pear shaped torso; and/or fur loss on her back flanks; you should know that those are the first signs of female problems, and if left unattended, could cause severe pain and even death to the piggie. You need to consult an exotics vet (not the family vet!!) for proper diagnosis and treatment. Often, treatment can be given that does not require surgery; but

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)

# WHEEL CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

whatever way it happens to go, your girl will be grateful that you were an attentive caregiver. This pain is not pleasant for them to have to deal with.

**SPAYING OR NEUTERING:** Most guinea pig owners will think at one time or another “Gee, wouldn’t it be nice to have babies and watch them grow.” Well, yeah, it would, except there is already so many guinea pigs that are unwanted and thrown outside to fend for themselves or taken to shelters and rescues, and being sold in pet stores that have no clue what they are doing, but just have them there to make the money, there isn’t any need for any help from us in breeding any more. There are so many horror stories of guinea pigs being left on door steps of shelters or rescues, of kill-shelters euthanizing piggies because the don’t have the space to keep them or the knowledge on how to take care of them. Just go to Petfinder on the Internet and do a search on guinea pigs, and read some of the heartbreaking stories of how piggies were left to die because they were no longer wanted. Then do an Internet search for PETA and read some of the really heartbreaking stories of cavyies and their treatment by those who think of guinea pigs as “throw away” pets, and then think again, “Do I really want to add to this.” I personally have 2 guinea pigs that were THROWN AWAY at a local river, left to fend for themselves or die. This type of “rehoming” usually guarantees that the guinea pig will be dead in less than 24 hours. Luckily, these two little girls had angels looking out for them because they were found and brought to me. I have another girl who was thrown out at a local high school, along with her sister, on a cold, snowy November day. Lucy was lucky because someone found her and she made her way to me. Her sister was not so lucky. She was never found, and there is no question in our minds that the sister froze to death. Some “rehoming”, huh??!!

This is one of the reasons why we stress that if you plan on housing a male with a female, one of them should be spayed or neutered. Neutering is much less expensive than spaying; and the surgery is less invasive and less costly. Spaying is a much more invasive form of surgery, more expensive, and the female has a much longer healing time.

The statistics on cavy births are that one out of every five female guinea pigs that give birth will die during or because of that birth. Also, a female guinea pig over seven months old that has never had a litter before cannot **safely** deliver her babies. Her pelvis fuses together by seven months old and this makes it almost impossible for her to deliver the babies without the penalty of death to her and/or the babies. It’s not a pretty thing to watch happen. Trust me on that!! Also, don’t purchase a female guinea pig (or any other pig really) from a pet store that keeps both males and females together. Baby females can get pregnant at 4 weeks old and a male can impregnate at 8 weeks old. When baby moms have babies, the results are not usually very good. If there are too many babies in a young mom, she can go into premature labor and the babies will be dead or die soon after birth; and often the mom doesn’t have enough calcium in her little body to feed the babies because her little body is trying to absorb it for her to grow. Something has to give, and regardless of who loses the calcium, it’s a death sentence for someone. Sometimes, accidents do happen in cases of miss sexed guinea pigs. If you have a female you believe to be pregnant you must get the sow to a cavy knowledgeable vet immediately if you witness any of the signs listed below:

- Sow straining for more than 10 minutes and not producing a baby.
- Sow bleeding
- Sow squealing loudly with each contraction
- Sow getting exhausted and just giving up from trying.
- No placenta being produced with the babies. There should be one placenta for each baby. The afterbirth will be a round flat bloody object ranging in size from a nickel to a quarter. If she stops eating or drinking or you feel there is something wrong, get to a vet right away.
- Sow smelling like nail polish remover, or acetone. This can occur from 2 weeks before until 2 weeks after the birth.

And if the mom is too old, her pelvic bones will have fused together and the birth canal will be blocked by bone so that the babies can’t get out easily, if at all. What happens then is that the babies are pushed over the pelvic bone like our fingers over sharp knives; and all of the babies will receive horrible wounds during the birth process. I have seen cases where this has happened and the babies were born alive, but literally shredded as they went over the pelvic bone, like they had gone through a paper shredder and lived ever so briefly to feel it. One can only imagine!!

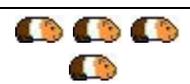
**CAGES:** Whatever you do, **DO NOT USE A CAGE WITH A WIRE BOTTOM AND NEVER PUT A GUINEA PIG IN AN AQUARIUM.** There is not enough air circulation in an aquarium, and living in an aquarium causes retinal atrophy (the guinea pig will go blind!!). As for wire bottom cages, a guinea pig has very delicate legs, feet and toes. Wire bottom floors are the single most reason for piggies getting a broken leg, which most often will result in amputation, or a leg that doesn’t heal properly. While guinea pigs can live on 3 legs, the operation is very painful and expensive, and if proper housing procedures would have been followed, it would be unnecessary.

**Wheel Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheelcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheelcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheelcare.org](http://www.wheelcare.org)

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

The second reason for not using wire-bottomed floors on cavies is because it causes bumblefoot. Bumblefoot is a very painful inflammation of the foot and foot joint that can lead to an infection and even amputation. This inflammation can and often does extend up the guinea pig's leg into the body, and can cause death. Bumblefoot can also be caused by a couple of other factors, but we'll get into those later.

The best cage for your guinea pigs is also the least expensive and the easiest to clean. Coroplast and storage cubes. Cages sold in pet stores are only recommended as a temporary cage for your piggie. The more room a guinea pig has, the better. Guinea pig rescue groups are now recommending cages made of coroplast and wire grids. For ideas on how to build your cages, visit the web site [www.cavycages.com](http://www.cavycages.com). The coroplast can be purchased at most sign shops and framing shops. I can also get coroplast in 13 different colors: black, grey, white, cream, clear (which isn't), green, light blue, medium blue, dark blue, purple, orange, yellow and red. The storage cubes are found only at Target. Construction of this type of cage is better for the guinea pig, and makes a great family project. A little imagination and the piggies will have a castle to be proud of instead of a small, cramped cage. And the cost of the coroplast and grids is less than \$40. A general guideline on recommended cage sizes are listed below, but remember guinea pigs need company, so you should have a minimum of two piggies.

<a href="http://www.cavycages.com/indexmetric.htm">http://www.cavycages.com/indexmetric.htm</a> Cage Size Standards				
# of Pigs	Minimum	PREFERRED	in inches	in grids
 ( )	7.5 sq ft	more is better	28" x 42"	2x3 grids
 ( )	7.5 sq ft	10.5 sq feet	30" x 50"	2x4 grids
	10.5 sq ft	13 sq feet	30" x 62"	2x5 grids
*reprinted with permission				

I have found that as a guinea pig gets older, they require less room than the average recommended sizes listed above. I can comfortably fit 3 adult guinea pigs in a 2 grid x 3 grid cage.

If you would prefer to not make a C&C cage, a midwest cage can be used to house two to three guinea pigs. Midwest cages can be purchased online and at Petco. The cages are a flexible waterproof material with wire walls much like a C&C cage but come preassembled.

## BEDDING

### **DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES USE CEDAR BEDDING!**

Cedar bedding causes upper respiratory infections in your cavy, which can be fatal. In fact, don't use any wood bedding chips that may have an odor of wood (called phenols). Another bedding, *Carefresh* (or products similar to Carefresh), is a store bought bedding that can be used for your piggie. It is recycled paper, and very absorbent. This absorbency reduces cage cleaning to about once per week, depending on how many piggies are in that area. Two to three inches of bedding is perfect. Over the years, the company has changed the formulations and I'm not a big fan of the product anymore. It is EXTREMELY overpriced and has proven to be hazardous for piggies. Since it is absorbent, any fruit that has water content has the juice absorbed into the bedding. The piggie can then eat the bedding and end up with an obstruction in its stomach or intestines and is most certainly doomed.

If you decide you want to use wood chips for bedding, there are two types that we recommended... Aspen or KILN DRIED pine. Just make sure the bag says KILN DRIED for pine. Aspen is a medium priced bedding that can be purchased at pet stores, feed stores and Tractor Supply stores. It has a slight odor to it, but it is not toxic to piggies. KILN DRIED pine can also be purchased at pet stores, feed

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
 429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
 Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

stores and Tractor Supply stores. I like the Tractor Supply Pine bedding that comes in the white bag. It is nice big flakes (their yellow bag is too fine, more like saw dust, which is bad for piggie respiratory systems). It is also VERY cost effective and complete guinea pig friendly.

Another common and favorite guinea pig bedding is fleece. If you decide to use fleece for bedding, make sure it is no-pilling fleece, folded to achieve 3--4 layers or use 1" of quilt batting between 2 layers of fleece, sewn like a quilt. Personally, I've found just folding the fleece to 3--4 layers works great. Brush it to clean on the off days, and wash it every other day. It washes nicely (I use hot water to make as sterile as possible on the wash and rinse with warm water); and dries in 15 minutes. And the only cost is the initial purchase of the fleece. I recommend having 2 sets available per cage, so that a clean set up is always ready. The purpose of using fleece is that the urine will wick through the fleece to a substrate below (usually puppy pee pads or another absorbent material like uhaul padding). The most effective way to use fleece is: on day 1, put down pee pads, then fleece. Day 2, brush off the fleece. Day 3, shake the fleece into the pee pads and wrap up and throw out the pre pass and put new pee pads down. Flip the fleece over to the clean side. Day 4, brush off the fleece. Day 5, remove fleece and old pee pads. Put in new pre pads and clean fleece.

It is important that in your cage, the guinea pigs have places to hide and feel safe. This can be accomplished many ways- pigloos and other hiders can be purchased. Or you can make your own. You will find many ideas online for fun hides for your guinea pigs online such as fleece forests, large pvc pipe, etc.

**HANDLING YOUR GUINEA PIG:** Guinea pigs are fragile pets. It is important that very young children aren't left to hold or walk around holding a guinea pig. Piggies are very fast, and if they decide to jump, they could be hurt or killed if they jump out of a child's hands. Children should never be left unattended with their cavies. Children up to the age of 11 or 12 should always hold their pets while sitting down. In fact, it's a pretty good idea for adults, too. One fast move on the piggie's part could lead to one hard squeeze on the owner's part, and oh-oh, poor guinea pig! When you pick up a guinea pig, you should always support it's rump from underneath, with your other hand on top of the shoulders of the piggie.

Since cavies are very gentle, shy pets, always move slowly towards them, and speak softly. The more you approach a cavie with fast, harsh moves and words, the harder it will be for them to learn to trust you. And trust is what your whole relationship with you guinea pig is about.

**LIFE SPAN:** Guinea pigs live an average of 5 to 7 years, but with love, quality foods and exceptional care, it is not unheard of for a piggie to live up to 10 years, or more. So, if you don't plan on being a committed piggie owner, don't make the acquisition to begin with.

**TEMPERATURES:** A guinea pig's normal body temperature is 101° to 104°, but they do not tolerate very hot temperatures. Acceptable temperatures are from 65° to 76°. If you are worried about the pig pen being too hot, freeze a half full bottle of water, and wrap it in a towel, put it in a loaf pan, and put the loaf pan in the pen with the piggies. You do not want to have a breeze directly into your guinea pigs cage no matter the temperature of the breeze as this can easily lead to upper respiratory infections.

**DIET:** Guinea pig diet is extremely important. Piggies don't manufacture their own Vitamin C, so they rely on their human family members to see that they get it. First, and foremost, forget those vitamin C drops for water. The ultra violet rays from sunlight and even indoor fluorescent lights will reduce the potency of the vitamin C very quickly and may cause your piggy to stop drinking enough water.. The oxbow vitamin C tablets are fine, if your pig will eat them, but if fed properly, a guinea pig should not need them. The vitamin C yogurt drops you see in pet stores are not appropriate for a guinea pig, as they contain dairy which guinea pigs can not process at all.

Each pig should have at least ½ cup of greens, and ¼ cup of other fruits and/or veggies TWICE a day. The best greens are green leaf and red leaf lettuce. Iceberg lettuce is never appropriate for a guinea pig as it contains very little nutrition and mostly water.. The greener the leaf the more vitamin C; but be careful, because a heavy leafed plant (i.e., kale, collard greens) could cause bloat. Cabbage should not be fed to guinea pigs for this reason. Some pigs are also more susceptible to bloat than others, so you have to be careful when you feed your cavie, and be on the lookout for this condition. Also, some greens such as romaine lettuce, kale, and others are high in calcium which can lead to bladder stones in guinea pigs. Calcium rich vegetables should be fed in moderation or even avoided in some pigs.

When you give them their "side dish" of other fruits and veggies, always try to make sure you have some form of bell pepper there, and raw beets. Raw beets are great for any animal's kidneys, and since one of the biggest killers for a guinea pig is renal failure; feeding your pig a healthy diet, enriched with raw beets (leaves as well as beet head) will help keep your guinea pig healthier,

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)

# WHEEL CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

extending its life. You can also feed you cavie a variety of other fruits and vegetables, but be careful not to feed too much in those areas where there is a high sugar or calcium content. Contrary to what most people think, carrots really aren't very good for guinea pigs, or rabbits for that matter. They are very high in sugar content, but they are just as high with calcium. Parsley and Spinach are also very high in calcium. These items should be fed in moderation and with other fruits and vegetables.

Cavies should also have an unlimited supply of hay. There are many different types of hay, but the most common is alfalfa, timothy, orchard and bluegrass hay. Timothy hay is the most common hay used, because it is the easiest to obtain. Alfalfa hay should only be used for baby or sick pigs, or pregnant or nursing pigs. However, if you want to make your guinea pig feel special, treat them to Kleenmama's bluegrass hay. This hay can be purchased online from a very reputable supplier, at [www.kmshayloft.com](http://www.kmshayloft.com). Most pet stores carry timothy hay, but be careful. You don't want hay that is yellow or mostly sticks. Hay should look like dried soft grass in a bag. If you have a feed store locally, check with them to see if they sell timothy hay by the bale. A bale of hay should cost you less than \$10. In the pet store, 40 ounces of hay can run you almost \$15. Don't let the size of the bale of hay scare you. Even if you only use half of it, it is still cheaper than buying nasty sticks posing as hay from the pet store. If you do get your hay from a feed store, be sure to specify "second cut" hay. During the end of winter and into early spring, you may be forced to go to first cut hay, which has thicker stocks than the second cut. The guinea pigs love first cut hay; but since it is tougher it can lead to injuries such as eye pokes.

Many people, including the rescue, feeds pellets. We only use and recommend Mazuri Timothy pellets. They are a healthy source of nutrition when combined with green or red leaf lettuce, bell or sweet peppers and other fruits and veggies as their second meal. Tractor Supply carries 25 pound bags for \$19. An excellent price. Two other brands that were recommend are Oxbow and ZuPreem, but their calcium content is higher, making them a second choice. Above all, avoid mixes with nuts, seeds or colored bits. If it looks pretty, don't feed it! There are less expensive guinea pig pellets that can be purchased, but they will usually have an ingredient called "ethoxyquin" in them. Ethoxyquin is a Vitamin C preservative, but it is also a known cancer causing agent. Under no circumstances should any pellets with this ingredient be fed to your beloved pet. If you feed a diet rich in the lettuces, fruits and vegetables that I have described above, as well as a GOOD quality timothy hay (this doesn't necessarily mean "store bought" hay), you would have no reason to feed the cavy pellets. Seeds are also non appropriate for guinea pigs as they are choking hazards and high in fat.

A great vegetable to add to your guinea pig's diet is raw beets. They can eat the whole beet... leaves, stems and bulb. Beets are good for a guinea pig's kidneys, but should be fed in moderation twice a week. Note: beets will turn piggie poop purple.

Attached is a list that I found on line that I use as a guide to feed my cavies. I don't remember the source, (my apologies to the author), but it is probably the most complete list I've found.

I'm putting it on it's own page so that you can copy it and carry it with you when shopping for your piggy. Also included on this list is what NOT to feed your furry friend.

It used to be common practice to give guinea pigs cardboard boxes and chew toys and hides. However, these boxes are made largely out of calcium and can lead to the production of bladder stones in guinea pigs. Unless your pigs do not eat the boxes at all, they should be avoided.

**HEALTH & FIRST AID:** This topic is so important, and to cover everything that you need to know in this booklet is almost impossible, so I will just list a few things to be on the lookout for with your piggie. If your guinea pig exhibits any symptoms listed below, or if it just seems to be "not quite right" get it to a vet immediately. While I will list just a few of the more common illnesses (maybe common, but can also be fatal), please make it a habit to go to the following link, [www.guinealynx.info](http://www.guinealynx.info) for references on illnesses and maladies that can befall a cavy. There are also forums there with experienced guinea pig owners (not breeders!!) who are always willing to help with information and suggestions.

**Wheel Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
**Email: [wheelcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheelcare2017@gmail.com)**  
**[www.wheelcare.org](http://www.wheelcare.org)**

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

With the permission of Guinea Lynx, I am reproducing their emergency medical guide. Please take this information seriously. If you suspect your pig is sick, it is always best to seek veterinary treatment. Your guinea pig may have been ill for some time before the symptoms are even noticeable.

**The following symptoms are SERIOUS and warrant a trip to the vet ASAP. As this list is not complete, if you have any concerns, PLEASE, see a vet immediately.**

- **Not eating** is extremely serious, as your pet's system will shut down with dire consequences. After as few as 16 to 20 hours of anorexia, liver cells begin to break down and from then on, your pig will only get worse. **If your guinea pig is not eating, get to a vet immediately to determine the cause and begin treatment.**
- **Crusty eyes, Labored breathing**, crackling sound from the lungs, eyes that are almost sealed shut, discharge from the eyes and/or the nose, sneezing, coughing, and wheezing can all be symptomatic of an upper respiratory infection (URI). Antibiotics are prescribed to treat these bacterial infections (cavies do not get cold viruses). Get to a vet immediately if you see any of these symptoms. **Untreated URI's are almost always fatal.** Occasionally allergies can produce the same symptoms - but because URI's are so deadly and fast moving, it is imperative that the vet rules out a URI before considering the possibility of an allergy.
- **Blood in the pee, squeaking while peeing**, a serious and painful condition. A vet should check your pet for a possible urinary tract infection (UTI) or problem with the bladder or kidneys. A *sour smell* could indicate a cyst, bladder or urinary tract infection, or stones. It is also common that the guinea pigs back end will be wet with urine, and that can be another sign of UTI or other urinary problems.
- **Diarrhea** especially if accompanied by the pig looking ill and sitting with its coat puffed up: get to a vet. A black, foul-smelling watery mess indicates a very serious intestinal problem (bacterial infection, eating spoiled/moldy hay or vegetables). For diarrhea resulting from antibiotic use (killing off intestinal bacteria), consult your vet, who may switch to a different one and prescribe an intestinal bacterial supplement (a probiotic). Milder forms of diarrhea (too many fresh fruits or vegetables or a change in feed) are also serious, require immediate treatment (generally replacing fresh vegetables with lots of timothy hay), and with no rapid improvement require a trip to the vet. Severe diarrhea can also be caused by E. coli and giardia. Your vet will do a fecal smear to identify the problem and prescribe appropriate medications. When your piggie has diarrhea, dehydration and weight loss occurs. It's always a good idea to have good quality pellets on hand for just such an emergency. The three brands I recommend are Mazuri, Oxbow Cavy Cuisine or Zu preem (timothy based).
- **Listlessness, discharge from eyes and nose, swollen joints, difficulty walking** get to a vet. These are signs of [scurvy](#).
- **Labored breathing, blue tinge to the lips and snout (only visible in pink skinned pigs)**, get to a vet. May be possible heart or lung problems.
- **Drooling, Weight loss, interest in food but can't or won't seem to eat:** get to a vet. The molars could be overgrown ([malocclusion](#)), which will result in the pig slowly starving to death if the cavy does not receive treatment. Can be misdiagnosed as vitamin C deficiency (scurvy).
- **Bloat** (a light tap on the side sounds hollow) is a serious medical condition that causes severe pain and can be fatal. Take the guinea pig to a vet immediately as this is often a secondary symptom if the diet is proper and low in bloat causing vegetables. Can sometimes be treated by simethicone or baby gas drops found at the grocery store.
- **Guinea pig in discomfort:** get to a vet. Could be an intestinal blockage.
- **Difficulty walking, Pig holding it's head tilted to one side:** get to a vet. Prompt treatment is critical for complete recovery. This can indicate an inner ear infection (torticollis/wry neck).
- **Hair loss, dry, scaly skin, open sores**, scratching, pain when touched: get to a vet. If it is [Sellnick Mange](#) (a parasitic infection) it can even be fatal and usually warrants two ivermectin treatments 10 days or so apart. May also be fungal. If left untreated, this can cause fatal seizures in guinea pigs.
- **Poisoning:** Symptoms vary widely. The American Veterinary Medical Association's "A Pet Owner's Guide to Common Small Animal Poisons" lists dangerous chemicals that may accidentally be ingested by your pet. These

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
**Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)**  
**[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)**

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

include a short list of poisonous plants, human drugs dangerous to pets (such as acetaminophen -- also known as Tylenol), household products and more. If you suspect your pet has been poisoned, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Guinea pigs very seldom get over an illness without help and can decline EXTREMELY quickly. While it may appear your guinea pig has "just" come down with something, it may have been concealing symptoms for some time, a behavior that puts additional stress on the immune system. Concealing illness is a survival mechanism in the wild, where a lagging pig would quickly be picked off by a predator. For these reasons, if you suspect your pig is ill, it is always best to take it to a vet. If you have more than one pig, you might take along a healthy one so the vet can compare them (unless it has already been separated from the sick one to avoid passing on an illness to your other cavies).

**Often the first sign of illness is weight loss.** The most important tool you have to monitor your pig's health is to weigh it once a week. Keep a chart! This will enable you to spot gradual weight loss and get medical help before it's too late, perhaps buying you valuable time for early treatment. Weight loss may also be one of the first signs of [malocclusion](#).

One ounce (30 grams) weight fluctuation is OK.  
Three ounces (90 grams) - Extreme red alert.

Two ounces (60 grams)- Go on alert.  
Four ounces (120 grams)- Get the pig to a vet.

Other general signs of illness are: rough or puffed up coat, dull and/or receding eyes, lethargy, hunched posture, refusal to eat or drink. Be an observant owner! Behavior unusual for your guinea pig (which may include sitting with it's face in a corner, lowered responsiveness) could also indicate the need to seek medical assistance or at the very least, the need to monitor the pig closely.

You should also have an emergency medical kit on hand consisting of the following items: triple antibiotic ointment or Neosporin; q-tips; 1 cc syringe; betadine solution; pellets; Critical Care (liquid food replacement); simethicone (children's gas relief liquid) and nail trimmers to cut nails.

**AGAIN, AND I CAN'T STRESS THIS ENOUGH**, TAKE THE TIME TO GO TO AN **EXOTICS VET, not a vet that says they treat exotics**. We use and recommend Dr. Robert Wagner, he's at North Boros Veterinary Hospital on Babcock Blvd most Monday and Tuesday evenings. Call or email him to setup an appointment, 412-897-2426 or email [drbobwagner@gmail.com](mailto:drbobwagner@gmail.com) or visit his website [drbobwagner.com](http://drbobwagner.com). He is one of the most brilliant and respected exotics vets in the area. For weekend or evening emergencies, consult your closest emergency veterinary clinic or call or text me. If there is a problem and you can no longer keep your guinea pig, please call me at the above telephone number to surrender the guinea pig(s), no questions asked.

## **Reach Us**

Please feel free to contact us anytime with questions, concerns, adoptions, surrenders and boarding at [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com). You can also reach us through our Facebook page, Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue; or our Facebook forum page, PA Small Animals.

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
**Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)**  
**[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)**

# WHEEK CARE GUINEA PIG RESCUE (WCGPR)

## RECOMMENDED VEGGIES

### **HIGH Vitamin C foods:**

Parsley - curly or plain (**high in calcium**)  
Cilantro / Chinese Parsley / Corriander greens  
Celery leaves  
Collard greens  
Mustard greens / Leaf Mustard  
Swiss Chard, Red Chard  
Beets & Beet greens (**good for kidneys**)  
Spinach (**feed in moderation, linked to formation of kidney & bladder stones**)  
Carrot tops / leaves  
Peas in pods, Pea Shoots (not dried)  
Dandelion greens  
Kale - curly or plain (**can cause bloat**)  
Broccoli (stems are liked better than flowers)/  
Rabe / Rapini (**can cause bloat**)  
Cauliflower / Broccoflower (**can cause bloat**)  
Brussels Sprouts (**can cause bloat**)  
Cabbage, Red Cabbage, Tuscan Cabbage, Savoy (**can cause bloat**)  
Kohlrabi leaves  
Bell / Sweet Peppers - red, green, yellow  
Tomato (**leaves poisonous**)  
Orange (caution - sores around lips can develop)  
Tangerine / Mandarin (sores around lips can develop)  
Grapefruit (caution - sores around lips can develop)  
Lemon, Lime (**feed cautiously**)  
Cantaloupe, Honeydew  
Currants - yellow, red or black (leaves also edible)  
Strawberries , Gooseberries  
Kiwi Fruit  
Mango, Guava  
Papaya / Paw Paw / Tree Melon (remove skin/seeds)  
Persimmon

### **LOW Vitamin C foods:**

Romaine Lettuce  
Lettuces - red, green, butter, Boston, etc (**NO ICEBERG**)  
Frisee Lettuce  
Arugula / Rocket / Roquette / Rucola  
Green or Belgian Endive  
Radicchio / Italian Chicory  
Treviso Radicchio  
Salad mix (without iceberg lettuce)  
Artichoke  
Asparagus  
Anise, Basil, Dill, Mint, Thyme  
Chives (caution, feed in moderation)  
Green Onion tops (caution, feed in moderation)  
Green Leek tops (caution, feed in moderation)  
Sweet Onions (caution, feed in moderation)  
Celery stalks (cut into small pieces)  
Corn on the cob (strings, leaves & stalks)  
Green Beans in pods / String Beans (not dried)  
Carrots (**HIGH IN CALCIUM & Vit. A causes liver problems**)  
Yam / Sweet Potato  
Beets  
Celery Root / Celeriac  
Kohlrabi bulbs  
Radishes (if mild)  
Turnip, Parsnip, Rutabaga, Parsley root  
Cucumber (fresh only, not pickled)  
Squash - acorn, banana, butterhorn, spaghetti  
Zucchini  
Pumpkin  
Pineapple - fresh (lip/mouth sores can develop)  
Apple, Crabapple (seeds poisonous)  
Pear, Asian Pear

Plum, Prune (dried high in sugar - as treat only)  
Peach, Nectarine  
Apricot  
Cherries (remove pits)  
Cranberries (whole fruit, not concentrate or juice)  
Raspberries, Blackberries, Blueberries  
Watermelon (feed in moderation, can cause diarrhea - high water content)  
Banana (feed in great moderation - can cause constipation)  
Passion Fruit / Granadilla  
Grapes (feed in moderation, high in sugar)

### **EDIBLE wild grasses, plants and herbs:** *(make sure you know what you are picking! be sure to pick from places free of contaminants such as pesticides , exhaust fumes or animal urine ; pick plants that are healthy looking, without insect damage, fungus spots, breakage, or wilting)*

Grass (common grasses are edible, avoid ornamental grasses)  
Clover (Trifolium repens or Trifolium pratense)  
Dandelion - pick leaves, stems, flowers (even root OK)  
Anise (Pimpinella anisum)  
Blackberry leaves - pick young & tender leaves and shoots  
Calendula (Calendula officinalis) - leaves and flowers  
Caraway (Carum carvi)  
Chamomile (Anthemis nobilis)  
Chickweed (Stellaria media)  
Cleavers / Stickyweed / Goosegrass / Bedstraw Coriander  
Cowberry (Vaccinium vitis-idaeae) - berries, leaves in moderation  
Cow Parsley (Anthiscus sylvestris)  
Dog Rose (Rosa canina) - ripe fruits  
Lemon Mint / Melissa (Melissa officinalis)  
Miner's Lettuce (Claytonia perfoliata)  
Peppermint (Mentha piperita)  
Plantain (Plantago major or Plantago lanceolata)  
Raspberry leaves - pick young & tender leaves and shoots  
Stinging Nettle (Urtica dioica)  
Shepherd's Purse (Capsella bursa-pastoris)  
Silverweed (Potentilla anserina)  
Vetch (Vicia x)  
Yarrow (Achillea millefolium)  
Wild Chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla)  
Wild Strawberry (Fragaria vesca) - berries and leaves

### **AVOID Danger foods:**

Iceberg Lettuce (low nutrition, high water)  
Hot Peppers / Chiles / Paprikas  
Hot herbs and spices  
Pickled veggies (dills, capers, sour krauts)  
Garlic or pungent onions (will not poison pigs, )  
Tomato leaves & stalks (poisonous)  
Tomatillo leaves & stalks (poisonous)  
Rhubarb (poisonous)  
Seeds (choking hazard)  
Dry beans and peas  
Nuts (too high in fat)  
Avocado (too high in fat)  
Coconut (too high in fat)  
Horseradish (leaves probably ok, root too pungent)  
Mushrooms  
Potatoes (poisonous if green or sprouted)  
Taro (dangerous if eaten raw / unprepared)  
Jams, jellies and fruit preserves (too high in sugar)  
Fruit juices (sugar-free, or unsweetened juices are OK)  
Teas, coffee, colas  
Fried, cooked and otherwise prepared foods  
Peanut butter, cakes, cookies, baked goods  
Milk and milk product

**Wheek Care Guinea Pig Rescue**  
429 Esther Avenue - New Kensington, PA 15068  
Email: [wheekcare2017@gmail.com](mailto:wheekcare2017@gmail.com)  
[www.wheekcare.org](http://www.wheekcare.org)