



MISFITS RESCUE

Chinchilla Care Guide

Chinchillas are clean, quiet and inquisitive small mammals that can make wonderful pets for adults and experienced owners who enjoy observing natural behaviours. They are crepuscular – most active in the evening and at night – and can live for 10–20 years with proper care, so they are a long-term commitment.

Chinchillas are also highly social animals, thriving when kept in compatible pairs or same-sex groups rather than alone.

Environment & Housing

Providing the correct environment is essential for your chinchilla's physical health and emotional wellbeing. Chinchillas are active jumpers and climbers, not ground-dwelling animals, so space, height and enrichment are vital.

Enclosure Size & Design

Chinchillas require a large, multi-level enclosure that allows them to jump, climb and exercise freely.

Recommended minimum enclosure size (per pair or small group):

- At least 1.5m (length) × 1m (depth) × 2m (height)
- Larger is always better, particularly in height, as chinchillas naturally leap vertically.

Tall, aviary-style enclosures with multiple solid platforms are ideal. Wire-only cages or small hutches are not suitable for chinchillas and can lead to injury and stress.



Shelving should be:

- Made from solid wood (safe for chewing)
- Staggered to allow safe jumping distances
- Securely fixed to prevent collapse

These recommendations reflect best-practice welfare advice from RSPCA and veterinary-approved small-pet care standards.

Flooring & Bedding

Chinchillas have delicate feet, so flooring and bedding must be chosen carefully.

Safe bedding options include:

- Dust-extracted hay (also supports foraging behaviour)
- Paper-based bedding designed for small animals (unscented and ink-free)
- Kiln-dried, dust-extracted wood shavings (such as aspen)

These materials are absorbent, comfortable, and safe if accidentally ingested.

Avoid the following: Unsuitable bedding can cause respiratory issues, digestive blockages, or limb injuries.

- Sawdust or dusty wood shavings
- Cotton wool or fluffy bedding
- Cedar or pine (aromatic softwoods)
- Cat litter or clumping substrates



This care guide has been written in-house using veterinary-approved information and aligned with RSPCA welfare guidance.

Nest Boxes & Hiding Places

Chinchillas need access to quiet, enclosed spaces where they can rest and feel secure.

- Provide at least one solid wooden hide per chinchilla
- Untreated wood is ideal, as it doubles as a chewable enrichment item
- Avoid plastic hides, which can be chewed and swallowed

Dust Baths

Chinchillas do not bathe in water. Instead, they require daily access to a dust bath to maintain coat and skin health.

- Use volcanic chinchilla dust or fine pumice-based sand
- Offer the bath for 10–20 minutes per day
- Remove after use to prevent soiling

This is essential due to their extremely dense fur, which can trap moisture and cause fungal infections if not properly maintained.



Temperature, Lighting & Location

Chinchillas are highly sensitive to heat.

- Ideal temperature range: 10–18°C
- Never allow temperatures to exceed 20°C
- Keep enclosures out of direct sunlight, away from radiators and draughts

The enclosure should be placed in a quiet indoor location, away from televisions, loud music and sudden disturbances. Chinchillas are naturally alert animals and can become stressed by excessive noise.

Cleaning & Hygiene

- Spot-clean daily to remove droppings and soiled bedding
- Fully clean the enclosure regularly using pet-safe disinfectants
- Ensure bedding is completely dry before replacing

Good hygiene helps prevent illness while still allowing chinchillas to retain familiar scents that reduce stress, as recommended by Burgess Pet Care veterinary guidance.

Diet & Nutrition

Chinchillas are herbivores with sensitive digestive systems, requiring a high-fibre diet that supports gut and dental health.

Daily Diet Includes:

- Unlimited good-quality hay (e.g., Timothy or meadow hay) – this should form the majority of their diet and helps wear down continuously growing teeth.
- Grass-based pellets/nuggets – a measured daily portion designed for chinchillas to provide essential vitamins and minerals.
- Fresh, clean water available at all times from a suitable bottle.



Treats & Foraging:

Offer healthy, chin-safe treats in small amounts (e.g., dried herbs or leaves) to encourage natural foraging behaviours.

Here are some examples of chin-safe treats you can offer in very small amounts and infrequently, alongside their main diet of hay and high-fibre pellets. These are aligned with veterinary and welfare guidance like the RSPCA and Burgess recommendations, which emphasise keeping treats low-moisture, low-sugar and herb-based so you don't upset your chinchilla's sensitive digestive system.

Chinchilla-Safe Treat Options

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Dried Herbs & Flowers

These mimic the dry plant matter chinchillas would find in the wild and are good for enrichment:

- Dried dandelion leaves
- Dried chamomile flowers
- Dried nettle
- Clover
- Dried wildflower forage mixtures

These can be sprinkled into their hay or given as tiny hand treats.

Dried Forage Treats

- Traditional rolled oats (very small pinch)
- Small pieces of wheat biscuit or shredded wheat (about the size of a 5p coin)

Occasional Fruit-Based Treats

Very sparingly and only as occasional enrichment (due to higher sugar content):

- Rosehips (dried)
- Raisins or dried cranberries (very occasional, not daily)



Handling & Social Needs

Gentle Interaction:

Chinchillas have delicate bones, sensitive hearing and can be easily stressed by loud noises or sudden handling. Approach them calmly and handle them close to the ground to avoid injuries.

Many chinchillas prefer interaction on their terms and may be more comfortable exploring from your lap or hand rather than being carried.



Companionship:

They are naturally social and often happier with a chinchilla companion. When introducing new animals, do so gradually and always provide enough space, food, water and hiding places for each animal.

Health & Welfare

Regular health checks and veterinary care are essential:

- Daily observations for changes in eating, droppings or behaviour.
- Annual vet visits with a vet experienced in exotic pets.

Common health concerns:

- Dental problems due to inadequate fibre.
- Digestive issues or bloating from inappropriate foods.
- Foot sores or injury from unsuitable flooring.



Consult a vet immediately if your chinchilla shows reduced appetite, changes in droppings, lethargy or signs of pain.

Behaviour & Enrichment

Chinchillas are intelligent and active. Provide toys, chew blocks and climbing structures to prevent boredom and fulfil natural behaviours.

They are most active at dusk and night and benefit from supervised playtime outside the enclosure in a safe space.



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