



Boar Care: All You Need to Know

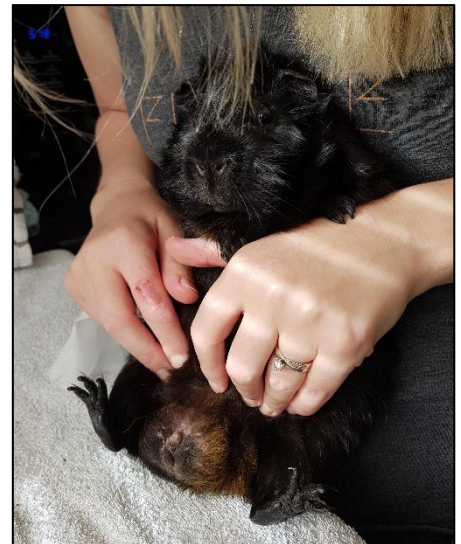
I never would have believed you if you'd told me that one day I'd be a boars-only household, but there you are: times change, and with it, knowledge, experience and skillsets evolve accordingly. With the added experience that comes with every boar who I see as a grooming or boarding client, it's fair to say I've learnt more about boars and boar-specific issues in the past two years than I have in my entire 16 years as a guinea pig keeper.

I'm here to share with you the whats, the whys and the hows when it comes to boys and their bits. I'm going to tackle the subject of "Boys Bits"™ in particular. Call them what you will –privates, delicats, underneaths, genitals, balls, willy, bum, parts. I'll stick to the anatomically correct words but when I'm addressing the subject of intimate boar maintenance in an overall context, I like to go with "Boys Bits"™.

What constitutes Boys Bits?

When I'm talking about "Boys Bits"™, I'm referring to the penis, testicles and the perineal sac (sometimes called the anal sac, anus, rectum, or PA sac). It's very intimate and yes, it's a grim job in so much as it does stink and it can be a bit messy. But as an owner of boars, you have to be subjective and accept that part of their essential care is the routine examination of their Boys Bits. To skip this part of their care is to increase their susceptibility to illness and infection, and to miss vital signs that could prevent serious but common health concerns such as bladder stones (you'll often find stones are preceded by signs that can be picked up on in moments during a penis examination).

The grease gland is *not* part of the "Boys Bits"™ collection as it is not exclusive to males; I have a separate infosheet all about grease glands already published.



How do you check Boys Bits?

I'll break down the process of checking "Boys Bits", and what you *should* or *might* find, into the three key areas: the penis, the testicles, and the anal sac.

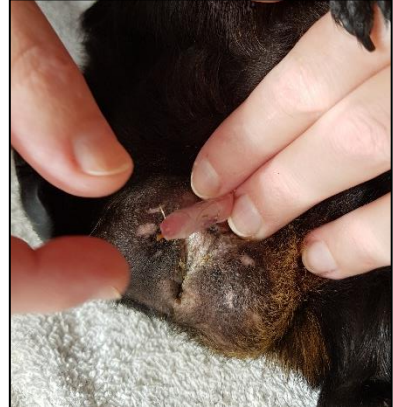
Penis

Once you get the hang of checking the penis, it's a swift job that need take no more than a few minutes at most. Examination requires the gentle extrusion of the penis from its shaft, which can be felt under the skin just above the nub that is usually the only visible part of the penis. Have someone experienced – your vet, or someone else reputable – show and teach you how to safely extrude the penis. It isn't usually a difficult job but nothing truly compares to learning hands-on, as you get a better idea of what to press, how to manipulate the area, what's OK and not OK to do etc.

Typically extruding the penis is achieved by gently pressing the top of the shaft under the skin and using your finger to essentially 'roll' the shaft away from under your fingers, thereby 'unfurling' it and exposing the full penis where that nub was.



You should not need any lubrication to do this, and it should not cause any pain. If all efforts fail, it's better to consult your vet and let them do the job. If the guinea pig expresses signs of pain (different to shrieks of protest), or if you feel a lump where the shaft lies under the skin, it's definitely advisable to seek veterinary attention. Lumps or swellings of any kind on or around the penis are not normal. If you have any reason to believe that your boar is not urinating, or if he has a hard lump under the skin where his penis is, I recommend seeking emergency veterinary care; the inability to pass urine, or the potential blockage of the urinary tract, quickly becomes life-threatening.



Assuming all is well though and you've managed to extrude the penis, you can begin your visual examination* and clear away any hay, hair, bedding and other debris that may have become tangled around the shaft. This is very common and very normal – and is the very reason why you need to check the penis routinely. If you manage to pull debris away from the penis one month after it was last cleaned, imagine how bad several months or even years of build-up would be. At the very least it would be extremely smelly and uncomfortable; at worst it could strangulate the penis, cause friction which could lead to lacerations and inflammation, and even go as far as to cause an infection not just of the urinary tract, but of the penis itself.

**Don't forget, once the penis is out, to keep your fingers pressed gently at the base of the shaft – if you let go you'll find it disappearing again!*

You may notice a number of things when examining the penis. Firstly, a smelly creamy substance found on the penis is entirely normal, and is known as smegma. You'll also find it in the anal sac. While this is normal and you don't want to scrub the penis clean of any trace of it, it can be of benefit to remove the majority of the smegma. Sometimes it can build up into quite thick layers, which can make extruding the penis increasingly tricky. It also attracts hay, hair and bedding to it, which again isn't ideal. I find the most effective way of cleaning the penis is simply to gently wash it with your fingers whilst bathing the guinea pig (i.e. with the penis under shallow or running water), or with a wet washcloth, give the penis a **gentle** wipe and rinse.

This should also remove any other debris that has built up and will usually be the end of your job. Unfragranced baby wipes can be used, but I find they can be a little drying, so I've switched to water and a washcloth for all in-house grooming.





There is, however, some advantage to be had from getting a little bit of smegma on your fingers and rubbing them together to feel the consistency of it. Why? Calcium-heavy urine sits on the penis after the boar urinates, and over time you may well be able to feel tiny pieces of grit mixed in with the smegma. Smegma should be smooth and paste-like. Any hint of grittiness, however minor, warrants a closer observation period of urine output along with changes to the diet, as well as a vet check to ensure there are no bladder stones, sludge or silt anywhere in the renal system. Grit is often one of the earliest signs of problems to come, but if you act as soon as grit begins to appear, then you should – with luck – be able to avoid the worst of it.



It's not uncommon either, in unneutered boars, to come across some thin, squishy, white-ish strings wrapped around the penis, or sticking out the end of it. These are thankfully not a worm of any kind, however much they may look like one at first! These are sperm rods and are simply one of the delights of keeping boars. Remove the rods as you would any other debris. (And check any of your boars cagemates for any signs of 'boar glue' that made it any further than the culprit himself...!)



Finally, don't be alarmed if when you have extruded the penis fully you see two flesh-coloured 'spikes' attached to the end. These are entirely normal. Do not be tempted to pull them or try to remove them, but if you do have any concerns about them, as always it's best to check in with your vet.

Sometimes to get the penis to go back in you might need to very gently massage the area under the skin where the shaft lies, or massage gently around the base of the penis. It is very rare for the penis to become 'stuck' out, it will go back in, but it may sometimes take a little manipulation. If you are really struggling, then applying a small dab of coconut oil or a tiny smear of Vaseline at the base of the shaft should fix things.

On that topic however, I will give a mention to the aptly named condition 'cauliflower willy'. This is when the folds of skin around the base of the penis (or the nub that you can see when the penis is not extruded) seem to become slack and 'lumpy' in appearance. It basically looks like a cauliflower, hence its name. It is usually harmless and not something to worry about, but if your boar does develop it – it's usually the older gents who are more prone to it – then do make sure you keep up with "Boys Bits"™ checks and cleans, as it will be the case that the area will get more dirty (as more of the skin of the penis is exposed to the cage floor) and may be slightly more susceptible to irritation or urine scald. Again, if you have any concerns, do give your vet a call.



As with anything "Boys Bits"™, don't be embarrassed when talking about anything you're not sure about or that you think might be wrong, or if you simply have no idea how to handle all this delicate stuff. Remember vets have trained in anatomy and they are way beyond feeling any embarrassment at being asked to look at your boar's penis/testicles/anal sac.



Testicles

The testicles are straight-forward: look at them to make sure they look the same as is normal for that boar. No sudden changes in size or colour, no lumps or injuries on the scrotum. Feel both testicles, rolling them gently between your fingers, looking for any lumps or swellings that shouldn't be there. Essentially it's not much different to checking human testicles for any abnormalities. Obviously you can only do this for boars who've been through adolescence and whose testicles have descended – very young boars have no discernible testes for a good few months, but as they hit 3 months and beyond, you will begin to notice some softness and slow swelling developing as their hormones begin to kick in. If you have any concerns about undescended testicles, or if you're unsure whether your boar's testes are 'normal', do check in with your vet.

Anal Sac

The anal sac is located below the penis. Using your fingers on either side of the opening, gently tease the anal sac open. In most boars it will be stinky and have some degree of smegma coating the internal walls, but it will also almost always have some unwanted debris stuck in there too. Hay, hair and bedding are again the most common things to find; sometimes very small amounts only, sometimes quite significant amounts. The important thing to remember is not to stick anything in or up the anal sac, as you don't want to cause more problems. Instead use a wet washcloth or suitable alternative wrapped around your finger to wipe all the areas that you can see by teasing the opening apart. As with the penis, removing all of the smegma isn't a goal you want to aim for – in any case it is impossible – but do focus on pulling out all the debris that has built up, and gently wipe over the areas you can access.



Sometimes, especially with older boars, you may find that the anal sac starts becoming quite slack. A very common side-effect of this is a condition known as impaction. Impaction is when the softer faeces - the caecotrophs that guinea pigs normally eat directly from the anus in order to gain the vitamins missed the first-time around – are not expelled properly from the anal sac and instead remain in the sac, building up into a denser, messier, stinkier mass of faeces as more and more of these caecotrophs fail to be pushed out fully. It's not unheard of for some boars to have had a sizeable ball of faeces removed when the impaction was first discovered, a ball that can be quite solid and mixed up with hay, hair, bedding and whatever else found its way into the sac in the meantime.

Dealing with impaction is unpleasant but necessary. The severity of it varies between boars, so while some are quite capable of managing to go a week between clear-outs, others need clearing as often as two or three times every day.



The exact cause of impaction is not particularly known, nor are any risk factors that indicate a boar may be susceptible to it. It does appear to be more common for intact (entire) boars to suffer impaction, but I've also heard of neutered boars having the same issues. Many boars will go through their lives never experiencing faecal impaction, but plenty will develop it in middle- or old-age. There seems to be no correlation between diet, environment or exercise either, but it is widely agreed that it is best practice to ensure any guinea pig with impaction has a large cage and is exercised regularly, just to ensure muscle wastage is not a factor, and to make sure the diet is high in fibre and roughage: a minimum of 80% hay, if not 90%, with the remainder being a small amount of quality, nutrient-rich fresh vegetables, and a small amount of dry food.

As disgusting as it sounds, a boar with impaction should generally be offered the resulting mass of faeces after clearing the blockage from his anal sac, as he will sometimes choose to eat some/all of it exactly as he would have done had he been able to access the droppings when they first presented. For this reason alone, it is worth getting into the habit of checking and clearing out impacted boars daily, as opposed to any less often, unless the boar has a very mild case which does take a full week to build up into a movable mass.

Most case of impaction can be removed by massaging around the mass and rolling it out of the anal sac without needing to 'go in'. It can help, however, if the mass is particularly large, to lubricate the opening of the anal sac with mineral or coconut oil, either using your finger or a q-tip/cotton bud, just to make the passage out a little more slippery, and therefore easier.



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