



Basic Home Health Checks

Guinea pigs do not need regular health checkups at the veterinary surgery, but it is important that as an owner you closely monitor the health and wellbeing of every single one of your guinea pigs at home.

The first and most important rule is to **get to know your guinea pigs. Know what is normal for each individual animal. The better you know your guinea pigs, the faster you will spot if they fall ill.**

DAILY you need to check that each of your guinea pigs is:

- Eating and drinking as normal;
- Breathing normally;
- Moving around and behaving normally;
- Urinating and defecating as normal.

Any change from what you recognise as normal for your guinea pigs warrants closer observation from you, and in many cases this may result in a veterinary health check if the animal is obviously unwell, or if any of his symptoms do not improve.

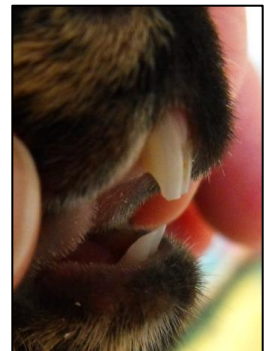
WEEKLY it is easy to conduct a more thorough, all-over examination. This can be done in a matter of minutes once well practiced. The idea of this is that you **look at, smell and feel** many of the parts you are examining. Using a multi-sensory approach will alert you much quicker to a problem than relying on observation (eyes) only. It may help, if you are a beginner with guinea pigs, to ask your vet to show you how to carry out a rudimentary health examination, so that you are able to do so safely, swiftly and effectively at home. With practice, you will be able to conduct a full-body once-over in little more than one minute per guinea pig.

- **Ears** – look at and feel the skin around the ears, on the back of the ear, and on the underside of the ear flap. Sniff the inside of the ear.
The skin around and in the ear flaps should be healthy and clean. There should be no odour.

- **Eyes** – look at the skin and hair around the eye, and across the eye itself.
Eyes should be bright and shining, with no hair loss and no heavy crusting around the eyelids.

- **Nose** – look at the nostrils, the skin on and below the nose.
The nose should be completely clean and dry.
- **Lips** – look at and feel the skin and the hair around the lips.
There should be no hair loss or scabbing on or around the upper or lower lips.

- **Incisors (front teeth)** – gently part the lips to look at the incisors.
Teeth should be white, strong and evenly worn, no slanting. The lower incisors





should sit slightly further back than the uppers when viewed from the side. An “indent” behind the upper incisors, as shown in the photo above right, is entirely normal. It is called the caudal notch. Do not assume that because the incisors seem long they are overgrown.

- **Hair and skin** – look at and feel the hair from root to tip, and examine the skin on the shoulders and rump in particular; stroke the guinea pig firmly on all sides from head to rump.

The hair should be clean and shiny, free from any visible parasites or skin flakes. Skin should be clean and free from any dandruff/dryness/flakiness or scabbing. There should be no lumps on the skin.

- **Grease gland and genitals** –look at and feel the grease gland (located where a tail would be – see the photos below); in boars check the penis and anal sac, and in females the vaginal opening.

The grease gland should be free from a build-up of grease. Males should have a clean penis and anal sac; a very thin white coating is normal smegma and does not need cleaning off, but all hairs and debris should be removed. Females should have a clean vaginal area, no lumps.



- **Underside (jaw to genitals), abdomen and breathing** – feel the entire underside by stroking the animal in short strokes from the jaw down the chest and over the belly; gently press on alternate sides of the abdomen with your hand checking for any tightness/bloating; look at the breathing movements and listen to the chest by holding your ear to each side of the pig’s upper abdomen.

There should be no lumps on the underside, but note that both sexes have two nipples on the lower abdomen. The abdomen should feel soft, there should be no tightness or pain. Breathing should be steady and even, not exaggerated or bellowing from the low hips region.

- **Feet and nails** – look at and feel the nails and pads of all four feet. Nails should be a reasonable length and trimmed regularly, not curled under or overgrown. Foot pads should be clean and free from swellings or scabs. Trim any foot spurs off (foot spurs are flaps of hard dead skin that stick out from the pads of the feet), or find someone who you trust to trim the spurs off without hurting your guinea).

Last updated: February 2019