



The Importance of Weight Checks

Keeping track of the weight of your guinea pigs is useful not only to yourself, so you can see what is a normal weight range for your guineas, but also to your vet. When diagnosing an illness or establishing the severity of it or even the prognosis, it can help a vet greatly if he sees the amount of weight that has been lost and over what period of time that loss has occurred.

“Feeling” the physical condition of your piggies is still important as some guineas do slim down without actually losing weight; a common development as they start to head towards their senior years (4+). But just knowing how your piggies “feel” is too unreliable. For one, your vet is not able to feel the normal condition of all of your pets so when you go to them for help, they aren’t going to be able to tell at all if the weight loss has been large or small, sudden or gradual...you need to be able to give them this information. Feeling your piggies cannot tell you *how much* weight has been lost either, which will not help your vet and will not give you an accurate view of the general health of your animals.

How often should I weigh them?

Weekly weight checks is ideal, especially with young guinea pigs who are still growing, pregnant sows who need close monitoring, and with more senior guinea pigs whose body condition will change gradually (thus you will need to know the new ‘norm’ for them).

It is fine to weigh once every two weeks if that is easiest for your particular circumstances, but ideally no less often than this as there would be little point in tracking the weight without these routine checks; fluctuations could not possibly be monitored as effectively and a sudden drop in weight might perhaps not be spotted soon enough.

Guinea pigs who are actively unwell, especially ones who are refusing to eat, should be weighed **daily**. If the guinea is continuing to lose weight each day despite intervention, it either suggests that the guinea pig is not absorbing nutrients through his gut wall (expect this with systemic mycosis, oral thrush and any conditions of the digestive tract), or more likely the food intake is still too low and you need to increase the amount of syringe-feeding you are doing. As a rough guideline, the amount of syringe-feed that an adult guinea pig who is not eating for himself at all needs, is at least 80-120ml per day.

What is a healthy weight for guinea pigs? Is it possible that my guinea is overweight? What if the weight is not exactly the same each week?

Most guinea pigs reach their adult weight at 12-15 months. Their weight should stabilise by 15 months, although don’t be too concerned if they experience another growth spurt up to the age of 18 months. All guinea pigs can be declared fully grown at this age. As with every other species, including humans, some guineas are naturally very large while others are far more delicate and petite. The generally accepted ‘normal’ weight range is **2lb to 3.5lb**, or **900g - 1600g**. This isn’t written in stone, though - some piggies may be perfectly healthy and slightly outside these margins, and still be perfectly healthy and normal! As long as the animals are eating well, healthy, and can move around normally, you probably don’t need to worry about the size of them.



“Obesity” Problems

Very few guinea pigs are actually overweight or obese. It is normal for guineas to have quite a large double-chin, or lump of fat and skin on their throat/neck; this is known as a dewlap (see photo below) and is perfectly common. The main indications that a guinea pig may be a little heavier than he should be is a lethargic lifestyle (e.g. only moving to get food, and then shuffling back to his favourite sleeping spot!) and if there is a lot of excess fat/flab around the abdomen and around the tops of the legs. If a guinea pig is unable to move freely and normally due to his weight, then he definitely will need his food intake altering.



If you suspect your guinea pig is overweight, do not put him on a “diet” - the only things you should need to do are **cut right down** on the amount of dry food given, **change to a grain-free** dry food if possible (there are now several excellent options on the market and the high street), **make sure you are feeding a grass hay** (meadow, oat, timothy, orchard grass, rye) and not a lucerne hay (e.g. alfalfa), and finally **increase floor time/exercise**.

One way to encourage exercise is to spread the daily servings of fresh veg all around the exercise area, so the piggie has to move around a wide area to find his favourite foods. This will also suit his foraging instincts well. Lots of toys - blankets, tunnels, balls, newspaper tents, soft toys - will also encourage a guinea pig to take an interest in his wider surroundings. An absolute minimum of 1 hour exercise time should be offered every day to overweight piggies - although as with all guinea pigs, the rule of thumb is that the smaller the cage, the more time they need to run around on the floor/in a large exercise pen.

Weight Fluctuations

It is not often that you will have identical readings every week, especially if you are weighing in grams on a digital scale. Small differences between readings is normal; a fluctuation of up to 2oz / 60g is typically okay and can simply be the difference between a full bladder and an empty one! Any gain or loss above 60g should be treated with concern, and additional weight checks should be carried out daily. This will also encourage you to spend more time with your pet, meaning you'll spot anything else that isn't right about him much quicker than if you didn't weigh him for another week.

In terms of expected weight gain, as a general guide:

- Young pups will gain an average of 1oz / 30g per week until around 4-6 months of age. Weight gain will slow down after this but should still be steady and fairly consistent.



- Pregnant sows will gain an average of 2oz / 60g per week.

The weight gain in pregnant sows does vary hugely depending on the age and condition of the sow and the size of her expected litter, so do ensure you monitor her for other signs of pregnancy if you do suspect she is “in pig”.

What do I use to weigh them?

Normal kitchen scales work just fine, as long as they give an accurate reading. Many people find manual scales with bowls that sit on top to be ideal, but frankly it can be said that, as long as the pig can fit on the scales safely and stay still for long enough to get an accurate reading, almost any type should be fine.

Mechanical and digital scales are both useful; digital is ideal for a quick reading but can sometimes be tricky to fit a guinea pig on, if they are just flat, so you have to modify by sitting a bowl onto the scales before switching them on, then adding the pig to get a reading... it is mostly down to personal choice - and what you have available!

Finally!

And remember, if you've gone to all the effort of reading this and you are set to get into the habit of weighing your pets weekly, you will need to record the weights and dates for each pig! I offer a free weight chart which you can download and print.

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