



Prevention of Vitamin C Deficiency in Guinea Pigs

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Guinea pigs rely solely on dietary source to receive adequate **Vitamin C** (ascorbic acid) because like humans and primates, their body does not produce it.

Like humans and primates, they are **unable to make their own Vitamin C** and require 15-25mg per day on average for healthy guinea pigs and 30mg per day for growing or pregnant guinea pigs. The daily requirements for Vitamin C will be met as long as a balanced diet of good quality dry pellets and greens is fed.

Feeding your guinea pig to avoid Vitamin C deficiency

Guinea pigs need a constant supply of grass hay, such as meadow hay or timothy hay, as this is the most natural part of their diet. Hay also helps prevent dental problems due to tooth overgrowth, ensure gastrointestinal health by providing adequate fibre, improve environmental enrichment and reduce behavioural issues such as hair chewing. Hay alone is not an adequate source of Vitamin C however.

The best way to supply adequate Vitamin C in your guinea pig's diet is through feeding fresh foods rich in Vitamin C.

Below are some examples of fresh guinea pig friendly foods rich in Vitamin C and the daily amount required:

- Red capsicum (2 tablespoons)
- Kale (1/3 cup)
- Parsley (1/3 cup)
- Broccoli (1/3 cup)
- Broccoli leaves or stalks (2 tablespoons)
- Cauliflower (4 flowerets)
- Alfalfa sprouts (1/2 cup)
- Guava (1 tablespoon)
- Strawberry (2-3 berries)
- Kiwifruit (2-3 tablespoons)
- Green capsicum (3 tablespoons)
- Pineapple (1/3 cup)
- Red cabbage (1/2 cup)



- Snow peas (1/2 cup)

Other Vitamin C rich herbs and vegetables that can be fed to guinea pigs are kale, bok choy, cho sum, English spinach, coriander, dill and mint.

Vitamin C deficiency in guinea pigs

Without adequate Vitamin C, guinea pigs can develop scurvy, resulting in the following issues:

- Poor immune system
- Lethargy
- Poor haircoat
- Painful teeth and gums
- Haemorrhage
- Muscle and joint pain resulting in lameness
- Pneumonia
- Diarrhoea
- Weight loss
- Skin infections and non-healing wounds
- Death

Treatment of Vitamin C deficiency in guinea pigs

For guinea pigs that are unwell with suspected Vitamin C deficiency, they need to be supplemented with 50-100mg of a Vitamin C supplement daily such as Pentavite drops (1ml/kg), available from most pharmacies. Generally, guinea pigs who have not been eating well due to another disease process are likely to be Vitamin C deficient and will require supplementation to prevent scurvy from developing.

Diet is extremely important in guinea pigs and a high quality diet can contribute significantly to well-being and longevity. So, remember - keeping your piggies healthy, starts with a well-balanced diet rich in Vitamin C!