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OWNING A PET CHINCHILLA

General Information

Chinchillas can make fun, enjoyable pets. The chinchilla is a rodent related to the guinea pig; they originate from South America where they live in the Andes Mountains. In addition to their popularity as pets, they are also raised commercially for their soft, luxurious pelts. Chinchillas can exhibit "fur slip"; part of the fur can be shed if the pet is handled roughly or the fur grasped too tightly. Their average life span is about 10 years. They are nocturnal animals and are often more active at night, preferring to sleep during the day. They do not hibernate. As with any pet, they do occasionally get sick, and their illnesses are often severe. All pet chinchillas should be examined by a qualified veterinarian within 48 hours of purchase, and at least annually thereafter. This "new pet" exam is critical to detect signs of disease and help new pet owners get off on the right foot. So many problems are caused by misinformation; the first veterinary visit can help prevent well-intentioned owners from doing the wrong thing and ultimately contributing to the pet's early death.



Interesting information about Chinchillas

- A.** Like all rodents, the chinchilla's teeth grow continuously throughout life.
- B.** Chinchillas have a digestive tract (like other rodents and rabbits) that is specialized for digesting large amounts of fiber.
- C.** The breeding season of chinchillas is mainly from winter through spring, November through April or May.
- D.** Baby chinchillas, like their relatives, baby guinea pigs, are born with eyes open, fully furred, and active.

Selecting Your Pet

Chinchillas are usually purchased at pet shops or through breeders; they are often also for sale at exotic pet shows. As with any pet purchase, avoid chinchillas that appear ill. Chinchillas

should be bright and alert, and move quickly when startled. Avoid pets with closed eyes or discharge from the eyes or nose. Check the ears for redness or excess wax, which might indicate an infection. If possible, examine the teeth and make sure the incisors (front teeth) are not overgrown. The pet should neither feel fat nor thin; you should be able to feel the ribs with just a small amount of fat over them. Check the anal area for diarrhea or moistness, which might indicate a gastrointestinal infection.

The First Veterinary Visit

Your chinchilla should come with a health guarantee that requires a checkup by a veterinarian within a few days (usually 48 hours) after purchase. All pets including chinchillas need regular examinations. Select a veterinarian knowledgeable about chinchillas. The visit includes determining the animal's weight, as well as checking for lumps or bumps. The animal is examined for signs of dehydration and starvation. A fecal test is done to check for internal parasites. The veterinarian can also determine the sex of your pet. If all turns out well, your pet will be given a clean bill of health. Like all pets, pet chinchillas should be examined annually and have their feces tested for parasites during the annual visit.



Vaccinations

Pet chinchillas do not require vaccinations.