



## Guinea Pig Helpline Factsheet

## Administering Oral Medications

Guinea pigs may need medication for almost any kind of ailment. Medications come in three administration methods: parenteral (injected), topical (on the skin), and oral (by mouth). Injections are usually performed by vets or rodentologists, although some owners may have been taught how to inject their guinea pigs for specific medical reasons. Topical medicines or shampoos tend to be simple to apply. Oral medication is perhaps the most common prescribed for guinea pigs, and given oral medication can be prescribed for almost any ailment, this is the one I am focusing on.

The first word of warning here is to **never put medication or supplements into a guinea pig's water**. There are some very serious issues with this method, including the following:

1. **The dosage will be inaccurate.** Even if the pig drinks an entire bottle full of water fairly quickly and supposedly gets all the meds/supplement, there is no guarantee that the water does not drip or get spilt/spat out, which instantly alters the dosage in the remaining water. There is a reason vets should prescribe a specific dosage of medication according to your guinea pig's needs; if anything less is given it is highly likely to prove ineffective - *and is tantamount to giving your guinea pig no medication at all*. Likewise with supplements, if the guinea pig needs additional Vitamin C, this must be given *directly* to the guinea pig to ensure a safe and effective dosage.
2. **Most guinea pigs live with at least one other cagemate.** Splitting the pigs up when one is ill is not often necessary and can, in some cases, be detrimental to the sick pig. Thus if cagemates are kept together and medication/supplements are put into the water, there is no way of monitoring how much the ill pig drinks, and there is a distinct likelihood that the healthy piggie would end up drinking some of the medication.
3. **Guinea pigs need fresh, clean water.** Medication and supplements can distort the taste of the water, discouraging the pigs from drinking from it.

If a vet should advise you put any medication or supplement in the water, I very strongly recommend requesting a specific dosage to be administered directly to the guinea pig.

### How to Give Oral Meds

When syringing anything into a piggie, always insert the syringe via the diastema. This is the gap either side of the mouth behind the incisors - if you try to get into the mouth through those front teeth, you will have a lot of difficulty! Push the syringe slightly (and slowly) towards the fleshy cheek pads - at this stage the pig usually starts complaining, trying to open and close his mouth, and this is the time to administer the meds. Push the plunger of the syringe steadily - don't squirt anything quickly, but do aim for a smooth action. For those who are unsure, you can start with the guideline of putting 0.3ml of liquid into the mouth at a time, giving the pig 3-5 seconds to swallow before putting in the remainder.

When tablets are to be administered, there are two methods that can usually be used. One is to use a finger to very carefully push the tablet towards the back of the mouth, until the guinea pig has no choice but to crunch it. This can only be done with small tablets, and only with an experienced hand. The easiest and most recommended method is to use a pestle and mortar to crush the tablet finely. Once crushed, add a small amount of water (variable depending on tablet size, most require approx. 1ml water). Mix well and use a 1ml syringe to administer the medication to the guinea pig.

There is also the very common problem of the guinea pig wriggling or fighting too much, making it difficult for the owner to even get the syringe into the mouth. One technique is to wrap the guinea pig carefully in a towel or specially designed restraint bag. Once he is wrapped, you can then hold the pig upright and support his body by holding his back against your stomach. You can then adjust your hand position slightly to hold his head still while you syringe in the meds.



For those who are more experienced, and who have much more placid pigs, wrapping is not necessary. With your arm along the body of a standing pig, position your hand over the pig's head with your thumb and forefinger at either corner of his mouth. Ease the tips of your fingers just inside the mouth slightly to open it up a little, and pop the syringe into the side of the mouth as before. This doesn't hold the lower jaw still, so he will try to open and close his mouth, but with a gentle yet firm grip he will not actually be able to fully close his mouth, giving you enough time to administer the medication.