

# Are Guinea Pigs for Me?

Guinea pigs need more care than most people realise. Before choosing your first guineas, it is essential to be fully aware of exactly what these animals require and of what will be required of you. You must consider a number of factors when you feel you would like to take on guinea pigs.

## What Guinea Pigs Need

You will spend, on average, at least **two hours a day** attending to your guinea pigs needs. This can involve cleaning the cage/hutch, supervising exercise time, preparing and serving food, and simply spending time with them, giving them cuddles and talking to them. The more guineas you have, the more time you should spend with them to ensure each individual animal has its physical and emotional needs maintained.

- At least one other piggie friend - guinea pigs should live in groups of two or more;
- A large cage and suitable bedding;
- Appropriate accessories - bowls, water bottles, hay racks, toys;
- Fresh water at least once a day;
- Plenty of hay, topped up at least once daily;
- A good quality dried food;
- Fresh fruits and veggies daily;
- Exercise time outside the cage, around 1 hour per day;
- Cuddles, love and attention.

The average lifespan of guinea pigs is 4-6 years, but some can live up to 10 years or even slightly longer. You must provide daily care throughout their lives.

Do try to plan ahead and see what situations you can foresee in the coming years. If you are a teenager currently at secondary school, consider if you would like to apply to university in a few years. If you are with a long-term partner, consider if you plan to expand your human family in the near future. If you have a good job, consider the implications on your home life if you are offered a promotion or a move.

Some things you can't plan for and you can't foresee, but being aware of likely (or unlikely) future events is a useful step prior to deciding whether guinea pigs are for you at this point in time.

## Your Situation - Home Life & Work

**Q: Are you a minor (under 16) and/or someone who relies financially on their parents?**

If so, you **must** ensure your parents co-operation and support in the care of the guinea pigs.

Even if it is a minor who cares for the animals day to day, it is actually the **parents responsibility** to make sure the piggies welfare is being looked after appropriately. A minor must also be able to call on their parents to provide financial assistance, thus the parents need to be fully supportive and act responsibly when bringing the guineas into the home.

Rescue centres will not sign an animal over into a minor's name, vets will not register animals under a minor's name, and pet shops are not allowed to sell live animals to under 16s, so a responsible adult must be supportive and involved in the guinea pigs care from the very beginning.

**Q: Are there children in the household?**

How old are the children? Do they have any allergies? Have you got the time to look after at least two guinea pigs, as well as maintaining your role with the children? How will you ensure the safety of the animals, especially when young children are around?

**Q: Do you share your household with others?**

Do your housemates have any allergies, or fears of small animals? Can you ensure your guinea pigs will be trusted and safe in the hands of everyone within the house?

**Q: Do you attend school/college/university?**

Have you got the time to look after guinea pigs as well as keeping up with important coursework or exam revision? What are your future education plans - is it possible to fit your guinea pigs into that? Some university dormitories do not allow pets - think about what you would do if faced with that situation.

**Q: Do you work?**

Will you have the time and energy to attend to the needs of your piggies after a long day at work? Does your work take you away from home at any time?

**Q: How are your finances?**

Are you in a good financial position? Can you afford the day to day care of piggies, and can you save up for vets bills?

**Q: Do you have other pets?**

If you have other pets, particularly ones larger than guinea pigs (cats, dogs), can you ensure the safety of the piggies? Are any of your other pets aggressive toward - or uncomfortable with - other animals (of their own, or other, species)? How do you cope with fulfilling the needs of all your other pets, will you have the time to care for two or more guinea pigs each day as well?

**Q: Do you ever go away on holiday?**

If so, are you willing to pay an experienced petsitter, or holiday boarding centre, to mind your piggies while you are away? Have you got friends or family you can trust with the care of the animals?

**Q: Are you willing to look around for a good vet?**

Guinea pigs require medical care from those with experience and training; not every vet has the knowledge and ability to diagnose and safely treat certain problems.

Are you willing to put yourself in the position of politely asking local vets on their experience and success with guinea pigs, or are you able to travel a distance to see a particularly reputable, skilled and trusted vet?

## Guinea Pig Quiz

It is important that you make the right decision on whether guinea pigs are the right animal for you. Take the short quiz below and see if your answers match those required to make a good guinea pig owner.

**Q: How long have you wanted guinea pigs for?**

- A: Less than two weeks;
- B: Less than one month;
- C: More than one month.

**Q: How much research have you done on piggies and their care?**

- A: None really;
- B: I've read one or two things;
- C: I've read a few books, looked at a few reputable websites and spoken to other guinea pig owners.

**Q: Do you want pets who...**

- A: Are instantly outgoing, friendly and settled;
- B: Do not need any human socialisation;
- C: Need human interaction and reward this with gradual increases in confidence and bravery.

**Q: How much can you afford to spend on fresh veggies each week?**

- A: None - they can eat what I eat!
- B: Very limited - I can only manage two or three foods just for them each week;
- C: Fairly flexible - I am willing to buy exactly what meets their nutritional needs and tastes.

Now see the verdict...

**Mostly As:** Guinea pigs probably aren't for you. Perhaps research a bit more and find out what guineas are like as a species before deciding.

**Mostly Bs:** You're on the right track, but need to do more research before deciding for sure.

**Mostly Cs:** Guinea pigs could be good pets for you. Make sure you have thought about everything in this leaflet, keep researching, talk to some rescues and keep your eye out for piggies in need of homes!

Remember this article and quiz is not a definitive guide to who should/should not take on guinea pigs, but everything mentioned in this article is important to take note of and consider. Taking on guinea pigs when you are not in the right position to do so is detrimental to the guinea pigs, as well as yourself.