**YVCipedia SMALL MMAMMMAL**

Chinchilla Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Chinchillas (*Chinchilla lanigera*) are small, crepuscular rodents native to the high Andes. With incredibly dense fur—far softer than most domestic animals—they thrive in cool, dry climates and can live up to 10–15 years in homes with attentive care. Though naturally active at dawn and dusk, chinchillas adapt well to pet routines and can form strong bonds with gentle handlers. Their playful nature and endearing behaviors—like “popcorning” (happy hopping)—make them engaging pets, provided their needs are met.

## **Housing & Environment**

Chinchillas fare best in tall, multi-level cages that encourage climbing and jumping. Solid platforms and ramps protect delicate feet. They are highly sensitive to heat; ideal room temperatures are between 60–72°F, and humidity should be kept under 40% to mimic their native arid environment. Daily out-of-cage time in a chinchilla-proofed area provides essential exercise and mental stimulation, helping prevent boredom and stress.

**Quick Environment Highlights:**

* Cage: multi-level with solid floors, hideouts, and secure latches
* Space: allow ample room—minimum 4 × 4 × 3 ft
* Climate: maintain 60–72°F, <40% humidity
* Out-of-cage play: 1–2+ hours daily, supervised
* Bedding: dye-free paper or fleece liners; avoid wood shavings

## **Diet & Nutrition**

A chinchilla’s diet centers on high-fiber grass hay (e.g., timothy), essential for digestion and continuous dental wear. Supplement with quality chinchilla-specific pellets once daily. Treats—small amounts of plain, dried fruits or vegetables—can enhance training and interaction, but should remain occasional. Water should be available via bottle and dish to ensure hydration and hygiene.

**Diet Checklist:**

* Grass hay: always available, replace only when soiled
* Pellets: formulated chinchilla diet, daily portion
* Treats: <1 tsp/day, low-sugar options only
* Water: dual container system, refilled daily

## **Healthcare**

Chinchillas should have an initial veterinary exam soon after acquisition and annual follow-ups thereafter. Common health issues include dental overgrowth, gastrointestinal disturbances, respiratory infections, overheating, and fungal skin conditions like ringworm. Prompt veterinary care is critical for lethargy, weight loss, abnormal stool, or fur loss.

**Health Reminders:**

* Vet visits: 1st visit post-adoption, then yearly
* Watch for: dental misalignment, diarrhea, nasal discharge, overheat symptoms (panting, drooling), bald patches
* Temperature care: avoid exposure above 80°F
* Grooming checks: inspect teeth and coat during appointments

## **Behavior & Handling**

Though athletic and curious, chinchillas typically dislike prolonged handling. Begin by offering treats and gentle pets at their level and support their body fully when lifting—not by the tail or scruff. They naturally communicate through hopping, tail flicks, and gentle nibbles. Nipping may occur if startled; with consistent, calm handling, many chinchillas learn to tolerate short periods of interaction and can even be litter-trained.

**Behavior Tips:**

* Handling: cradle like a football, always support feet
* Sociality: thrive in same-sex pairs or bonded groups
* Signs of stress: fur shedding (“dust baths” misuse), aggressive bouncing, sudden nips
* Enrichment: tunnels, safe wooden chews, exercise wheels (solids)

## **Grooming & Enrichment**

Chinchillas maintain their luxurious coat through dust baths rather than water baths, which should be provided 2–3 times weekly in a shallow dish. They can chew through many toys—offer sturdy wooden items and chew blocks to satisfy natural wear needs. Clean the cage weekly and remove wasted bedding and soiled areas daily, maintaining a clean environment that reduces mold, odors, and fungal growth.

**Grooming & Enrichment Essentials:**

* Dust baths: 10–15 minutes, 2–3× weekly
* Cage cleaning: daily spot cleaning; full wash weekly
* Toys: rotate chew toys and puzzle items to encourage play
* Overheating prevention: freeze dust occasionally; never bathe with water

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Popcorning** is a joyful hop often seen during play.
* They carry **20,000 hairs per square centimeter**, the densest fur of any land mammal.
* **Fur slip**: they may shed patches of fur to escape predators—this is a stress response, not illness.
* Chinchillas groom with dusty baths because their fur traps moisture—water baths cause fungal and other infectious issues.
* They hold food with nimble front paws and take it to an elbow paw “pocket” to eat later.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Tall, multi-level wire cage with solid platforms
* Dye-free paper or fleece bedding
* Hideaways, wooden chew toys, exercise wheel (solid surface)
* Ample grass hay and chinchilla pellets
* Dust bath dish and dust
* Water bottle and heavy bowl
* Fleece tunnel or soft hideouts
* Secure, ventilated travel carrier

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center 2025*