

ASSIGNMENT 216 TASK 1 HANDOUT

CHINCHILLA HEALTH

Condition of Skin and Coat



A Chinchilla must be provided with a sand bath for daily grooming. This is essential for keeping its dense, luxurious fur in good condition. Chinchillas have super soft fur and the skin should be free from cuts, lumps and bumps. Chinchillas are naturally neat animals that self-groom regularly. Dust baths are their preferred method of grooming, and it is essential to use very fine, powdery sand formulated for pet chinchillas. The dust absorbs oil, grease and dirt, helping keep their coat in peak condition. It is not necessary to brush a chinchilla, and most do not enjoy being brushed. Abnormal skin and coat conditions:

• **Shedding Excessively:** These pets can be quite nervous, and while some shedding is normal, if they are heavily

stressed they may shed excessively.

- **Wavy, Weak Coat:** If the animal's coat is growing wavy or if the fur breaks easily, it may indicate dietary deficiencies and too much protein.
- **Greasy Fur:** A chinchilla uses dust baths to absorb and remove excess body oil.
- **Bald Patches:** Stress and boredom can create bald spots on a chinchilla's coat, whether the fur is falling out naturally due to the uneasy conditions or the animal is biting its own fur.
- **Clumped or Matted Fur:** High humidity can affect a chinchilla's coat by creating thick clumps or mats that can be difficult to groom. Because these animals evolved in a low humidity environment, they have difficulty coping with extremely different climate conditions.
- **Fur Slip:** A single bald patch where the fur has fallen out in a clump is called a fur slip, and is a defensive mechanism chinchillas use, releasing their fur when they are caught by a predator. It is also important to note that fur problems can be symptoms of deeper health concerns. If your chinchilla has ongoing coat issues, be sure to seek appropriate veterinary help for an expert diagnosis.

Behaviour and posture

Chinchillas' behaviour depends on their age, personality and past experiences.

Chinchillas are very sociable pets and love to play! Always keep more than one chinchilla and provide them with lots of toys. Also, stimulate their natural behaviour by hiding treats around their cage. This will keep them amused and encourage natural feeding behaviours. In addition, branches and shelves allow your chinchilla to exercise by jumping around the cage. Chinchillas love to chew, so provide lots of chinchilla-safe wooden blocks or natural toys. Regular, daily playtime out of the cage is essential but make sure it's safe to let your pets out as they'll chew anything in sight. When they're frightened or in pain, chinchillas may change their behaviour or develop unwanted habits, such as aggression or hiding. Remember that your chinchillas have very sensitive hearing and are easily startled by loud or sudden noises, so be quiet and gentle around them and treat them with kindness. If the chinchillas behaviour changes, or you notice regular signs that they're stressed or scared, ask a vet or clinical animal behaviourist - they could be distressed, bored or injured. If your chinchillas' behaviour becomes an ongoing problem, get expert advice from a vet.

Appetite and water intake

Chinchillas are natural herbivores, surviving on fibrous, dry vegetation in the wild. A specially prepared Chinchilla pellet food makes an ideal core diet for your pet along with plenty of fresh hay. Very small quantities of fresh vegetables may also be given as an occasional treat – be careful as they can cause stomach upsets. The hay supply should be replenished each day and ensure fresh drinking water is always available. Like all rodents, a Chinchilla's front teeth grow continuously, so provide them with something to gnaw on – a fruit tree branch is ideal. Raisins or sultanas are perfect to offer as treats to your Chinchilla. Chinchillas drink roughly 55ml of water per day.



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Movement

Chinchilla's need at least an hour of daily exercise outside their cage and are at their most active during the evening and at night. Chinchillas like routine and should be given at least one hour of daily exercise outside their cage. Evening is the ideal time for this as your Chinchilla will be at its most active. They enjoy climbing and playing with toys.

Condition of eyes, ears, nose and mouth

Eyes

A healthy chinchilla should have clean, dry eyes. Check your pet's eyes every day to make sure that they are in good condition. Matted fur around the eyes can signify that they have been watering, producing discharge, or simply causing your chinchilla enough discomfort for it to rub and scratch them. Healthy chinchilla eyes are clear and lively looking. However, since chinchillas spend time in wood shavings and in dust baths, they sometimes suffer eye irritation. Signs of such irritation include an eye being held shut, constant pawing, and excessive tearing. A vet will be able to determine if there is something physical causing the irritation or if there is an infection that will require eye ointment.



Ears

Chinchillas don't often have problems with their ears. However, if you notice fluid coming from their ears, if there is repeated scratching, or issues with balance, you should seek the advice of a vet. Also watch out for ears that are unusually warm and red. This can be a sign of a fever and may be the beginning of pneumonia.

A chinchilla's ears should be clean and smooth. Look out for any unusual markings as these may be the result of infection. Watch to see if there is any scratching or rubbing of ears or head shaking, as this may be an indication of ear mites.

Nose

Believe it or not, chinchillas can get a cold just like people. Signs of a cold include a runny nose. The treatment for a cold is one of patience and ensuring that the chinchilla has enough water and is kept warm. Make sure to keep the chinchilla warm and that it is drinking well. Monitor the situation to make sure it doesn't get worse. One other thing, while a chinchilla's nose is runny, you should avoid giving it a dust bath.

Mouth

If Chinchillas need to be constantly chewing on hard objects like wood or pumice stones to keep their teeth trimmed. If a chinchilla's teeth grow too long, there can be some serious health complications. Symptoms of teeth problems include:

- Repeating pawing of the mouth.
- Dribbling or drooling when eating.
- A dramatic reduction in food consumption.
- Significant weight loss.
- Watery eyes that can be caused by excessively long molars.

A chinchilla's teeth should be yellow and not white. White teeth could mean calcium deficiency. This condition usually only affects nursing female chinchillas.

Appearance of urine and faeces

Chinchilla poop looks like rounded, cylindrical pellets that are dark green, brown, or black in colour. The pellets should be firm and dry. Chinchilla poop is supposed to be completely solid. That's because chinchillas come from a dry habitat where they have to conserve any water they get. It's for this reason that chinchilla pee should be deep yellow or even orange. As such, when your chinchilla goes to the toilet, its poops should be completely solid. This means that loose or runny stools can be nothing but a bad sign. Changes in chinchilla droppings are often the best indicator that your pet is suffering from an illness.

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Signs of stress or pain that chinchillas may show

Vocal signs

Making noises, such as barking or whistling.

Visual signs

- Chewing fur - either their own or another chinchilla's
- Patches of fur coming away when handling them
- Changes to feeding or toileting habits
- Over-drinking or playing with the water bottle
- Reluctance to move
- Repetitive movements such as racing back and forth on the bottom of the cage
- Hiding

The procedure to follow if an animal is found to be sick or injured

- Reporting and recording - Report to the manager immediately if a chinchilla is sick or injured. A vet may need to be contacted in some cases. Record the illness or injury in the animals records and staff communication book so that all staff members are aware. Record any signs or symptoms, especially anything new relating to the illness or injury.
- Monitoring - Keep a close eye on the chinchilla and monitor behaviour, eating and drinking and movement. Check on the sick or injured animal at least every hour and record your findings. Look out for any new symptoms.
- Isolating - Isolate a sick or injured chinchilla in it's own enclosure away from other chinchillas to prevent cross-contamination or further injury.
- When to call the vet - Always consult your manager before contacting the vet. Treatment from a vet should never be put off if the chinchilla is injured or sick. If you notice severe signs of stress, weight loss, not eating or drinking, not moving or laboured breathing you must contact the vet immediately.

The records kept to help maintain the health of animals

- Age - Knowing the age of a chinchilla is important as they will have different requirements and will behave differently at certain ages. Chinchilla behaviour changes as they become older so it is important to know the types of behaviour to expect relating to their age.
- Type - The breed of chinchilla should be known and recorded for identification purposes. Also different breeds of chinchillas behave in different ways and have certain characteristics and temperaments. Different sized breeds may require specific handling equipment depending on the size of chinchilla.
- Diet - The type of feed and amount should be recorded so that they are fed the correct quantities and food types needed to keep them healthy. It is also useful to see how much they are eating to check they are in good health and are receiving the correct requirements. If a chinchilla has a diet related illness, recording their diet will help to eliminate any foods that maybe making them ill.
- Weight - A chinchillas weight should be recorded to ensure there is no drastic weight gain or weight loss as this could indicate a serious health problem that may need addressing. Weight gain and weight loss could lead to illness.
- Comments - Extra information relating to behaviour, sleeping patterns etc. should be added to provide a better understanding of the animals health.