



FEEDING ENRICHMENT FOR SMALL MAMMALS

Is 'how' you feed as important as 'what' you feed?

Choosing the right food for your pet is an important element of pet care. However, not only what you feed but how you feed can have a significant impact on their well-being.

In the wild, small mammals would spend most of their time searching for, storing, and eating enough of their food which gives them the energy and nutrients that they need. You can encourage these natural behaviours in your pets by creating the right environment to help them stay active and stimulated by working for their food reward. While playing and exercise can help reduce boredom and stress in pets, feeding time is also a great opportunity for physical and mental activities and improving your pet's quality of life.

GENERAL BENEFITS OF FEEDING ENRICHMENT FOR SMALL MAMMALS

- Prolonging the feeding time which reduces boredom.
- Creating stimulating challenges to make them work and achieve rewards.
- Encouraging natural behaviour such as foraging, digging and stretching.
- May help prevent obesity by keeping pets active.
- Dental health benefits by helping to wear down teeth (for those pets with constantly growing teeth).
- Useful for training purposes and bonding between owner and pet.



RABBITS AND GUINEA PIGS

Herbivorous small mammals such as rabbits and guinea pigs enjoy foraging. So, putting their food in different locations will allow them to express this natural behaviour and will prolong their feeding time, keeping them active for longer.



You could place some of their food in hanging positions to make them stand on their hind legs and stretch their muscles to reach the food. Also try stuffing a cardboard tube with hay, herbs, or suitable vegetables for your pets to get the food out of.



The majority of the diet of **Rabbits** and **Guinea pigs** should consist of **good quality hay or grass**. Click on the QR Code opposite to view our posters online on this topic.

FERRETS

Ferrets enjoy solving puzzles and searching for their food so you can hide some of their food around their enclosure to stimulate this behaviour. Some dog toys and treat dispensers can be used for feeding enrichment for ferrets too!



A suitable small animal activity toy can be filled with treats or ferret kibbles to give them a challenge. Ferrets also love to chase things, so you can attach a treat to a string (or a cat teaser toy) to encourage their natural hunting behaviour.

HAMSTERS, GERBILS, MICE & RATS

Try using more than one location at a time to place their food. You can also hide some of their food, or treats like suitable vegetables, inside paper bags or cardboard boxes for them to shred and discover their rewards!



In the wild these animals dig burrows, which are a series of tunnels, to live, breed, and store their food. To encourage these natural digging and storing behaviours, you can provide ready-made tunnels, or let them make their own. Blocks of wood can be drilled to make tunnels, which the animals may enlarge themselves by their natural tendency to gnaw.

PLEASE NOTE:



- Only give treats and toys that are safe for your pet's species and size.
- Consult the pet food or toy manufacturer if you are not sure about a product.
- Treats should form no more than 10% of their daily calorie intake.
- Uneaten fresh food should be removed after a few hours to prevent spoilage.
- Fresh drinking water should always be available for pets.
- Consult your vet if you have any concerns over the health of your pet.

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CAN'T ALL SMALL MAMMALS EAT THE SAME FOOD?

OMNIVORES
These animals feed on a variety of food sources including both plant-based and animal-based foods like other omnivores.

HOW IMPORTANT IS WATER?
Drinking water is incredibly important and a constant supply of clean, fresh water should always be available to your pet.

PLEASE NOTE
Specialist, designed bottles with metal spouts are a good option as they reduce the risk of your pet drinking from the bottle. Although they are often mistaken for bathtubs, they are not intended for use with any of the species mentioned in this fact sheet. Small amounts of suitable fresh tap water and vegetables can also be provided.

Fresh drinking water should always be available.

THERE'S A PET OUT THERE FOR YOU!
With the right care, small pets make great companions for children and adults alike. Do your research to be sure you're offering the best care and watch your pet's health as you and your family thrive.

MORE ADVICE ON KEEPING SMALL MAMMALS CAN BE FOUND AT WWW.UKPETFOOD.ORG

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RABBIT SIZE-O-METER

Size-O-Meter Score:

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | VERY THIN More than 20% below ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Hip bones, ribs and spine are very sharp to the touch • Lack of muscle and very thin fat cover • The long curve is flat |
| 2 | THIN Between 10-20% below ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Hip bones, ribs and spine are easily felt • Lack of muscle and very thin fat cover • The long curve is flat |
| 3 | IDEAL Ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Hip bones, ribs and spine are felt but are completely covered by muscle and fat • The long curve is flat |
| 4 | OVERWEIGHT 10-20% above ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Pressure is needed to feel the ribs, spine and hip bones • Some fat begins • The long curve is rounded |
| 5 | OBSE More than 25% above ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Very hard to feel the spine and hip bones - ribs are not felt • Fat begins to spill out • The long curve is rounded |

PLEASE NOTE
Getting rabbits on the right body weight isn't the easiest task. When the pressure in the diagram above is felt, the rabbit is in the right weight range. If you can't feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your rabbit is too thin. If you can feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your rabbit is in the right weight range. If you can feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your rabbit is too thin. If you can feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your rabbit is in the right weight range.

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GUINEA PIG SIZE-O-METER

Size-O-Meter Score:

| | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1 | VERY THIN More than 20% below ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Each rib is clearly felt but not prominent • Ribs are spine are easily felt with the pressure • A lot of abdominal space can be seen |
| 2 | THIN Between 10-20% below ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Each rib is clearly felt but not prominent • Ribs are spine are easily felt with the pressure • A lot of abdominal space can be seen |
| 3 | IDEAL Ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Ribs are not prominent and covered by fat/muscle • Ribs are spine are easily felt with the pressure • A lot of abdominal space can be seen |
| 4 | OVERWEIGHT 10-20% above ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Ribs are harder to distinguish • Ribs are spine difficult to feel • Less fat visible |
| 5 | OBSE More than 25% above ideal body weight | | Characteristics: • Ribs are not visible and covered by fat • Ribs are spine difficult to feel • Less fat visible |

PLEASE NOTE
Getting guinea pigs on the right body weight isn't the easiest task. When the pressure in the diagram above is felt, the guinea pig is in the right weight range. If you can't feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your guinea pig is too thin. If you can feel the ribs, spine or hip bones, your guinea pig is in the right weight range.

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Learn more about small mammals!
Can't All Small Mammals Eat the Same Food? View our factsheets and body condition score charts for **Rabbits** and **Guinea Pigs** on our website. Simply scan the QR Code opposite!

