

# CHINCHILLA NUTRITION

## WHAT TO FEED YOUR CHINCHILLA

Chinchillas are known as herbivores. An herbivore is an animal that gets energy from consuming only plant material. This type of plant-only diet is important for herbivores as they must have food constantly moving throughout their digestive system to stay healthy.

Chinchillas benefit from high fiber, low carbohydrate, and low-fat diets. This is achieved by feeding your chinchilla a high-fiber grass hay, a fortified pellet diet as well as produce. Fruits can be offered to your chinchilla in small amounts as treats.

### Recommendations for a Healthy Chinchilla Diet:

#### HAY

Your Chinchilla should always have access to fresh, good-quality grass hay. Grasses add fiber to your chinchilla's diet to promote good gastrointestinal health. These dietary fibers are also important in maintaining your chinchilla's oral health. Chinchillas need to chew for a prolonged period to extract nutrients from their diet as well as to keep their ever-growing teeth ground down and in good condition.

Hay should make up about 75-80% of his/her diet.

Types of grass that can be purchased at pet stores are timothy hay and orchard grass. Oat grass and Brome are also acceptable feeds.

Alfalfa hay is not suitable for an adult chinchilla as this type of hay contains too much calcium and protein. Alfalfa hay should only be fed to chinchillas under 6 months of age, or to females that have given birth.

#### PELLETS

Hay based pellets, which are specifically formulated for chinchillas can be purchased at a pet store.

It is important to choose a pelleted diet that is hay-based. This type of diet should not contain any fruits, seeds, or nuts.

Pelleted diets should be limited to 1-2 tablespoons a day and should contain 15-20% fiber, 16-20% protein and 2-4% fat. Your veterinarian may recommend increasing or decreasing this amount based on your chinchilla's weight.

Chinchilla pellets will also look longer compared to other rodent diets which allow for easier handling for your chinchilla.

Do not substitute your chinchilla's pelleted diet for a rabbit, hamster, or guinea pig diet as this may cause nutritional imbalances.

It is not required to supplement your chinchilla with added vitamins or minerals if fed a good quality pellet diet.

#### PRODUCE AND GREENS

Certain fresh greens, vegetables and fruits may contribute to gastrointestinal upset and imbalances in certain minerals and nutrients. Because of this, it is important to feed your chinchilla a very limited quantity of produce, and to introduce greens slowly if your chinchilla is not accustomed to them, to prevent diarrhea.

Produce and treats should not exceed 10% of your chinchilla's daily diet.

Some options include basil, romaine lettuce, red leaf lettuce, cilantro, radicchio, swiss chard, and watercress.



Photos courtesy of Natalie Feld

Some greens to avoid are leeks, chives, onion, asparagus, avocado, peas, cabbage, corn, spinach, rhubarb, or rhubarb leaves.

## TREATS

Chinchillas have gastrointestinal systems that are not designed to tolerate foods high in fat or sugar. This means that your chinchilla should be fed only small amounts of fruits and nuts as treats (less than 1 teaspoon per day).

Avoid treats such as yogurt drops as these may contain high levels of sugars. Instead, feed small pieces of carrots, raisins or dried cranberries and apples as treats.

Some foods to avoid are bananas, sunflower seeds, and peanuts.

## WATER

Fresh water should be always available to your chinchilla, either in a heavy flat-bottomed bowl or water bottle. Ensure that water is changed daily.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Varying the types of hay can create added interest to your Chinchilla's diet, but it is important to continue to feed him/her the same amount of food every day. It is also important to note the amount of food your chinchilla is consuming because chinchillas mainly eat at night. This will allow you to notice any changes in your chinchilla's diet or appetite right away.

If dietary changes are made, please be sure to do this gradually, to allow your pet's system time to adjust to the change. It is also important to remember that some fruits, vegetables, and nuts are dangerous to chinchillas. If you are unsure if a certain food is not safe for your pet, it is best to not feed it and to always consult your veterinarian with any changes or concerns.

## References

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