



## **VITAMIN C DEFICIENCY IN GUINEA PIGS**

Guinea pigs, like humans, are incapable of making their own vitamin C so it is vital that they get enough of it in their diet. Low vitamin C is also called hypovitaminosis C and referred to as 'scurvy' by some. It can lead to a range of serious conditions and as always prevention is better than a cure.

### **What is Vitamin C?**

Vitamin C contains ascorbic acid and is required for healthy skin, cartilage, tendons, ligaments and blood vessels. It is also important in wound healing as well as the repair and maintenance of bones and teeth. Vitamin C also has antioxidant activity.

### **What are the signs of low vitamin C?**

These are variable depending on the level of vitamin C deficiency. Complete vitamin C deficiency generally leads to a more rapidly progressing form of the disease with acutely painful joints and teeth, generalised immobility, and anorexia (not eating).

Moderate vitamin C deficiency generally leads to a chronic form of disease with clinical signs including:

- Flaky, rough coat
- Painful swollen joints
- Lameness, decreased mobility
- Teeth grinding, vocalising from pain
- Delayed wound healing
- Secondary bacterial infections
- Anorexia or difficulty eating
- Gastrointestinal stasis
- Bruising
- Bloody urine or diarrhoea
- Death

Young growing, pregnant, elderly, and/or sick guinea pigs at a higher risk of vitamin C deficiency.

### **How is this diagnosed?**

The diagnosis of hypovitaminosis C is generally based on the history, analysis of diet, clinical signs, radiographs and blood tests.

### **What treatment options are available?**

- Vitamin C supplementation via injection or oral medication is often administered in the first instance.





- Oxbow Vitamin C supplement tablets are available at our clinics.

- Vitamin C may be added to drinking water, but the vitamin is unstable in light and is most likely inactivated quickly.

The vitamin C daily requirement is around 10-50mg/kg for most guinea pigs.

### **How do I prevent this from happening to my guinea pig?**

Ensure there is enough vitamin C in your pet's diet by feeding vegetables that are high in it such as fresh kale, parsley, red or green capsicum, spinach and broccoli. A small amount of fresh good quality guinea pig pellets (eg Oxbow, Vetafarm or Burgess) each day can provide adequate vitamin C. We recommend storage of pellets in a cool, dry and dark place.

If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

