



## Vitamin C Deficiency in Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs require vitamin C in their diets to maintain their health, just like humans do. Like humans, guinea pigs cannot produce vitamin C independently and must obtain it from their diet.

A deficiency of vitamin C in guinea pigs can lead to a condition known as scurvy, which can cause a range of symptoms, including lethargy, poor appetite, weight loss, joint pain, swollen and bleeding gums, and hair loss. If left untreated, scurvy can be fatal.



### What is Vitamin C?

Vitamin C (ascorbic acid) 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 in Guinea Pigs?

The signs and symptoms displayed vary depending on the vitamin C deficiency level. 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 the 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 are at a higher risk of vitamin C deficiency.





## Diagnosis and Treatment of Vitamin C deficiency in Guinea pigs

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

The treatment for this condition will be determined on the diagnostic results and deficiency level. Treatment options can include;

- 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.



Most guinea pigs require a daily vitamin C requirement of around 10-50mg/kg.

### How do I prevent a vitamin C deficiency in my Guinea Pig?

To prevent vitamin C deficiency in guinea pigs, it's important to provide them with a diet that is rich in this nutrient. A good quality guinea pig food pellet should contain at least 10-30 mg of vitamin C per day, and fresh fruits and vegetables that are high in vitamin C, such as red or green capsicum, kale, broccoli, parsley and spinach, should be provided daily.



It's important to note that vitamin C is easily destroyed by heat, light, and oxygen, so it's essential to store guinea pig food in a cool, dark place and to offer fresh fruits and vegetables that have not been sitting out for long periods.

In addition, guinea pigs that are stressed, unwell, or pregnant may require additional vitamin C supplementation, so it's important to consult with your local [Unusual Pet Vets](https://www.unusualpetvets.com.au) team if you have any concerns about your guinea pig's health.

