

## **HELP - MY GUINEA PIG IS PREGNANT!**

Unfortunately, many guinea pigs purchased from pet shops (and often back yard breeders) are housed in mixed groups and are occasionally pregnant. It is a daunting process to be left with a pregnant pet, so here is some advice to take on board when left with a pregnant sow.

### **Sexing:**

- Before anything else make sure that all of your guinea pigs are sexed by an experienced vet or nurse. Make sure that all males are split from all females - this will obviously stop anymore unwanted matings. Guinea pigs will mate within hours of giving birth so all males must be removed prior to this.

### **Housing/companions:**

- Females can be housed in groups, however, it is best to separate off pregnant sows.
- When one goes into labor it can often set off another sow into parturition even if she is not ready.
- Remember that the minimum RSPCA guidelines for a pair of guinea pigs are 120cm by 60cm enclosure.
- Keep male guinea pigs as far away from females as possible. Boars should only be housed in pairs, and housing near sows will often upset males, cause fighting and undue stress.
- Please ensure that pregnant sows are housed indoors, the British weather is no place for a sow to be nursing pups.

### **Feeding:**

- Pregnant sows should be supplemented with calcium and vitamin C for their growing pups.
- Pelleted/muesli diets should not be overfed, as this can cause large babies which they may struggle to pass, although do not attempt to diet overweight guinea pigs at this time as this can lead to a fatal condition called pregnancy toxaemia.
- Alfalfa hay should be supplemented throughout pregnancy, along with unlimited amounts of normal hay and they should always be fed a selection of fruit/veg daily.

### **The birth:**

- The gestation period for a guinea pig is 63 – 72 days
- The majority of guinea pigs if housed and fed properly will have no problems in birth. However if she is over a year of age and has not had a litter before there is a chance she will encounter problems.
- After 12 months of age a guinea pig's pelvic ligaments have less elasticity and they will sometimes need an emergency caesarian or C-section.
- Other things to look out for which will need immediate vet attention are: straining/squeaking with no babies produced, vaginal discharge with no babies, excessive salivation, a loss in appetite or collapse.

### **The babies:**

- Guinea pig babies are called pups, and they are precocial. This means once they are born they are up and ready to go. Their eyes and ears are open and they are eating solid food from day one.
- Healthy birth weights for pups are between 60-100g (the larger litters will have smaller babies and vice versa), pups under 40g may need some extra supplementation
- They will feed from mum for the first 21 days. At this point they should be sexed and all males should be separated off from mum and female pups to prevent anymore unwanted pregnancies.
- Make sure that you weigh babies every couple of days after the birth to ensure that they are gaining weight. Any pups not gaining, not eating or looking unwell should be seen by a vet.

