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Their foods are available at Avian and Exotic Pet Clinic of Roanoke.

Feeding the Chinchilla

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In captivity it has been shown that chinchillas ingest most of their food at night and are selective feeders; when given the choice, they will select the most tender, succulent plant parts first. If not controlled, this high energy, lower fiber intake will lead to obesity.

Based on our dietary knowledge of the wild chinchilla, together with studies measuring the nutritional intake of the pet chinchilla, it has been determined that the pet chinchilla does best on a diet composed of free-choice (available all the time) hay and a small daily ration of pellets. This diet meets the chinchilla’s fiber and energy needs without causing obesity.

In addition to meeting nutritional requirements, the high-roughage diet of the chinchilla is critical in helping to prevent two of the most common health disorders seen in these animals: dental disease and gastrointestinal disease. We can mimic the chinchilla’s natural high-roughage diet by feeding hay as the primary food source.

Fiber also stimulates gastrointestinal motility, which allows ingested food to move along properly for normal digestion. Without fiber, the gastrointestinal tract slows down, resulting in changes in cecal pH, fermentation capabilities and microorganism populations. Over time, these disruptive changes can result in various forms of chinchilla indigestion: gastrointestinal stasis, constipation or diarrhea. The chinchilla with gastrointestinal stasis will be anorexic or have a reduced appetite and will produce very small stools or none at all. The chinchilla with constipation will strain to defecate, and the few fecal pellets passed are thin, short, round and occasionally blood-stained. The chinchilla with diarrhea may or may not have a reduced appetite and will pass soft stools that frequently mat the fur around the anus. Again, these forms of chinchilla gastrointestinal upset are commonly associated with inappropriate diets - that is, diets that contain excess amounts of grains, seeds and/or fresh greens without sufficient roughage or fiber.

Dental problems, such as malocclusion, molar root overgrowth and molar spurs, are also common in chinchillas. As in the rabbit and guinea pig, all of the chinchilla’s teeth grow continuously. Improper wearing of teeth, secondary to a diet low in fiber, and the lack of suitable chewing materials can result in sharp points on the upper and/or lower molars,
which leads to painful ulcers on the cheek and/or tongue. Providing plenty of free-choice hay ensures a normal chewing pattern, thus encouraging normal dental wear.

When it comes to feeding a concentrated ration, alfalfa-based pellets that contain more than 18% crude fiber and a minimum of 10% protein are recommended. Oxbow Pet Products' Chinchilla Deluxe provides a good balance of fiber, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals and is the pellet diet of choice for your pet chinchilla. As a general rule, feed 2 tablespoons (30 grams) of Chinchilla Deluxe to each adult chinchilla on a daily basis.

Treats such as fresh vegetables or herbs can be offered but should be fed in limited quantities. A diet containing too many vegetables can result in diarrhea and gastrointestinal upset. Feed the same foods consistently in order to prevent digestive upset, and avoid gas-forming vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower.

It is obvious that nutrition plays a key role in keeping your pet chinchilla healthy. Fiber is of utmost importance in preventing gastrointestinal upset and dental problems, two of the most common health issues plaguing the pet chinchilla. Be consistent with the amount of Chinchilla Deluxe fed and the type and quantity of treats offered. Your chinchilla’s digestive tract thrives on consistency, and your reward will be a pet that is active, bright, alert and healthy.

References:


