



## Guinea Pig Helpline Factsheet

## **Respiratory Distress: Diuretics Save Lives**

*The British Association of Rodentologists has requested that I share the following information among the guinea pig and veterinary community in relation to guinea pig health care.*

It has been noted in recent weeks that there has been a very significant increase in the number of guinea pigs suffering breathing difficulties (respiratory distress) during the current humid weather trend, and sadly it is also the case that many guinea pigs are dying as a result of failure to treat the animal, either through incorrect or incomplete treatment, or treatment that is simply given too late to save the piggie.

Guinea pigs in respiratory distress, whatever the cause of the distress (*be it allergic response, infection, heatstroke, systemic mycosis, or heart condition*), typically have some degree of fluid involvement with the lungs. If this fluid is not addressed at the earliest opportunity, and especially if the animal is already displaying severe breathing problems, then any attempts to treat the suspected underlying condition are likely to fail.

**A one-off dose of diuretic at the start of treatment can change this.**

Diuretics clear the fluid and ease the breathing. Diuretics buy time for the pig. Diuretics save lives.

The recommended and frequently used diuretic goes by the generic name **furosemide**. This is a Prescription-Only Medicine (POM) – your vet must prescribe it. All veterinary clinics should stock some form of this; various brand names of the drug include Frusemide, Lasix, Dimazon and Frusol.

Furosemide given in tablet form (correct dose: 5mg or 10mg) or liquid suspension is very effective, and if available should be given at the recommended dose as soon as respiratory distress is noticed.

In acute cases where the guinea pig is unable to consume anything safely by mouth, furosemide injected subcutaneously at the shoulder at the correct dose of 0.2ml is the safest method of administration, and at this point is absolutely vital to the animal's survival. Guinea pigs suffering respiratory distress must choose whether to eat or breathe, they cannot do both at the same time, so naturally they must choose to breathe. This means that trying to give anything by mouth – water, food, medicine – is potentially dangerous, particularly if the condition is acute. Until a diuretic has been given to ease this laboured breathing, the guinea pig cannot, and will not, recover.

Diuretics can clear the fluid and ease breathing difficulties as quickly as 1-3 hours after dosing, at which point treatment for the underlying condition has the chance to take effect. If fluid continues to develop and repeat doses of diuretic are needed, the guinea pig should be investigated for a heart problem.

But whichever way you look at it, whatever the underlying cause of respiratory distress, the conclusion is clear. Please insist that your vet listens to the fact that

**Diuretics Save Lives.**