



## Guinea Pig Helpline Factsheet

# The Importance of Weight Checks

Keeping track of the weight of your piggies is useful not only to yourself, so you can see what is a normal weight for your guineas, but also to your vet. When diagnosing an illness, it can significantly help a vet if he sees the amount of weight lost and over what period of time it has occurred.

“Feeling” the condition of your piggies is still important as some guineas slim down without actually losing weight - a common development as they start to head towards their senior years. But knowing how your piggies “feel” is too unreliable, it doesn’t tell you how much weight has been lost, which will not help your vet and will not give you an accurate view of the overall health of your animals.

### How often should I weigh them?

Weekly weight checks is ideal, especially with young guineas who are still growing and with pregnant sows who need close monitoring.

It is fine to weigh once every two weeks, but ideally no less often than this as there would be little point in tracking the weight; fluctuations would not be monitored as effectively and a sudden drop in weight perhaps not spotted soon enough.

Guinea pigs who are ill, especially ones who are refusing to eat, should be weighed **daily**. If the guinea is continuing to lose weight each day, it usually suggests that the food intake is still too low and you need to increase the amount of syringe-feeding you are doing (a guideline amount, for an adult guinea pig who is not eating for himself at all, is at least 60-120ml per day).

### What is a healthy weight for guinea pigs? Is it possible that my guinea is overweight? What if the weight is not exactly the same each week?

Most guinea pigs reach their adult weight at 9-12 months. Their weight should stabilise, although it is normal for another notable gain to occur a few months later. As with every other species, including humans, some are naturally very large while others are far more dainty and petite. The generally accepted weight range is 2lb to 3.5lb, or 900g - 1600g, although some piggies may be perfectly healthy and slightly outside these margins. As long as the piggies are eating well, healthy and can move around normally, you should not need to fret about the size of them.

### “Obesity” Problems

Very few piggies are actually overweight or obese. It is normal for guineas to have quite a large double-chin (known as a dewlap - see photo below). The main suggestions that a guinea may be a little heavier than he should be is a lethargic lifestyle (typically only moving to get some food, and then shuffling back to his favourite sleeping spot!) and if there is a lot of excess fat/flab around the abdomen and around the tops of the legs. If a piggie is unable to move freely and normally due to his weight, then he does need his food intake altering slightly.



If you suspect your guinea pig is overweight, do not put him on a “diet” - the only things you should need to do are cut down on the dry food, switch to a higher quality, hay-based plain pellet (if you’ve not already), and increase the exercise. One way to encourage exercise is to spread the daily servings of fresh veggies all around the exercise area, so the piggie has to move around a wide area to find his favourite foods. Lots of toys - blankets, tunnels, balls, newspaper tents, soft toys - will also encourage a guinea pig to take an interest in his surroundings. An absolute minimum of 1 hour exercise time should be offered every day to overweight piggies - although as with all guineas, the smaller the cage the more time they should have to run around on the floor/in a large exercise pen.

### **Weight Fluctuations**

It is not often that you will have identical readings every week, especially if you are weighing in grams. Some small differences between readings is normal; a fluctuation of up to 2oz / 60g is typically okay.

In terms of expected weight gain, as a general guide:

- Young piggies will gain an average of 1oz / 30g per week.
- Pregnant sows will gain an average of 2oz / 60g per week.



The weight gain in pregnant sows does vary hugely depending on the age of the sow and the size of her expected litter, so do be sure to monitor the guinea for other signs of pregnancy if you do suspect she is “in pig”.

### **What do I use to weigh them?**

Normal kitchen scales work just fine, as long as they give an accurate reading. Many people find the scales with bowls that sit on top to be ideal, but as long as the pig can fit on the scales, almost any type should be fine!

Mechanical and digital scales are both useful, digital is ideal for a quick reading but it is mostly down to personal choice - and what you have available!