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GUINEA PIG BODY LANGUAGE

Vocalizations

Guinea pigs make a variety of noises, some of which most guinea pig owners will recognize. Contented guinea pigs just going about their day often make a variety of squeaks, chortles, and quiet grunts. Squeaks and chortles also seem to accompany casual guinea pig interactions. Along with these frequent squeaks and chortles, there are a variety of other quite distinctive noises you might hear from your guinea pig:

- **Wheeking:** this is a distinctive (and common) vocalization, and is most often used to communicate anticipation or excitement, particularly about being fed. It sounds like a long, loud squeal or whistle. Sometimes wheeking may simply serve as a call for attention. Many guinea pigs will make a very loud wheeking noise when their owners open the fridge or get out the food container, in anticipation of getting some tasty treats!
- **Purring noises:** these have different meanings depending on the pitch of the sound (and the accompanying body language). Guinea pigs that are feeling contented and comfortable will make a deep sounding purr (accompanied by a relaxed and calm posture). However, if the purr is higher pitched, especially toward the end, this is more likely a sound of annoyance (a guinea pig making this noise will be tense and may seem to vibrate). A short purr (sometimes described as a "durr" type noise) may indicate fear or uncertainty (usually accompanied by the guinea pig remaining motionless).
- **Rumbling:** this is a deeper rumble than the purr. This noise is made by a male romancing a female, and sometimes also by females in season. Often accompanied by a sort of "mating dance," this is also sometimes called motorboating or rumblestrutting.
- **Teeth Chattering:** this is a sign of an agitated or angry guinea pig and is an aggressive vocalization. It is often accompanied by showing the teeth (which looks like a yawn) and means "back off" or "stay away."
- **Hissing:** like teeth chattering (these can occur together).
- **Cooing:** communicates reassurance. It is a sound most often (but not exclusively) made by mother guinea pigs to their young.
- **Shrieking:** a piercing, high pitched squeak that is fairly unmistakable as a call of alarm, fear, or pain. If you hear this type of sound, it is good to check on your guinea pigs to make sure everything is okay and no one is hurt.
- **Whining:** a whining or moaning type of squeak can communicate annoyance or dislike for something you or another guinea pig is doing.
- **Chirping:** sounds just like a bird chirping; this is perhaps the least well-understood (or heard) noise guinea pigs make. A chirping guinea pig may also appear to be in a trance-like state. The meaning of this "song" is the subject of much discussion but is still not well understood.

Body Language

Guinea pigs can also communicate via body language. It's a good idea to get to know what is normal for your guinea pigs so you can spot changes in their movement and body language as clues to what is

happening with them.

- **Popcorning:** easy to recognize, popcorning consists of hopping straight up in the air (sometimes repeatedly), just like popcorn popping, and it is most often seen in young guinea pigs when they are especially happy, excited or just feeling playful. It can also be seen in older pigs as well, though they usually don't jump as high as younger pigs.
- **Freezing:** a guinea pig that is startled or uncertain about something in its environment will stand motionless.
- **Sniffing:** sniffing is a way to check out what is going on around them and to get to know others (guinea pigs particularly like to sniff each other around the nose, chin, ears, and back end).
- **Touching Noses:** a friendly greeting between guinea pigs.
- **Aggressive Actions:** can include raising their head and/or rising up on their hind ends with stiff legs, shuffling side to side (again, on stiff legs), fluffing out their hair, and showing their teeth (yawning). Often accompanied by hissing and/or teeth chattering. If your guinea pigs do this with each other, be alert for fighting.
- **Strutting:** moving side to side on stiff legs can be a sign of aggression (often accompanied by teeth chattering), while strutting around another guinea pig while rumbling is a typical "mating dance" (thus the term "rumblestrutting").
- **Scent Marking:** guinea pigs will rub their chins, cheeks, and hind ends on items they wish to mark as theirs.
- **Mounting:** this can be either a sexual behavior (males to females) or a behavior used to show dominance within the guinea pig herd's social structure (especially between females).
- **Fidgeting** (while being held): this can often be a sign that your guinea pig needs to go to the bathroom, or that your guinea pig is just tired of being held. Either way, try returning your guinea pig to his or her cage for a bit.
- **Tossing Head Up in the Air:** a guinea pig getting annoyed with being petted will toss their head back as way of asking you to stop.
- **Licking:** most owners consider this a sign of guinea pig affection (though it is possible that they just like the taste of the salt on our skin).
- **Running Away From Being Picked Up:** guinea pigs tend to be timid, especially at first; this is not a rejection of their owners, but a natural defence mechanism. Given time and patience, almost all guinea pigs will come to accept being picked up for cuddles and play time out of the cage.