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# Lice and Mites in Guinea Pigs

## Basics

### OVERVIEW

- Scabies mites (*Trixacarus caviae*) are the most common and significant ectoparasite of the guinea pig. The mite causes severe itching, hair loss, and flaking skin. The life cycle from egg to adult mite ranges from 2 to 14 days. Guinea pigs can be so severely itchy that scratching can lead to seizures, severe self-trauma, and skin disease. Secondary bacterial infection of the skin is common. With severe infestations, the animal becomes thin, debilitated, and may die.
- Chewing lice (*Gliricola porcelli* and *Gyropus ovalis*) are lice that usually cause mild to moderate hair loss, and sometimes crusting of the skin.

### SIGNALMENT

Seen in any age guinea pig

### SIGNS

#### Scabies Mites (*Trixacarus caviae*)

- Hair loss and scaly skin usually beginning on the thighs and back, then extending over the shoulders and neck area
- Skin may be covered with a yellow crust
- Cause intense itching and possibly seizure-like behavior
- Progression to weight loss, lethargy, and general debility or death

#### Lice (*Gliricola porcelli* and *Gyropus ovalis*)

- Rough hair coat or lice, mites, or nits are seen on the fur (all are visible to the naked eye)
- Hair loss or excessive shedding
- Yellow crusting of skin

### CAUSES

- Scabies mite (*Trixacarus caviae*)
- Chewing lice (*Gliricola porcelli* and *Gyropus ovalis*)

### RISK FACTORS

- Poor husbandry
- Exposure to infested animal—Common sources of initial infestation include pet stores, animal shelters, and breeders.



## TREATMENT

### APPROPRIATE HEALTH CARE

- Guinea pigs with heavy infestations of *Trixacarus caviae* are often severely debilitated and may require hospitalization for supportive care during mite treatment.
- Mildly affected animals, and most with lice infestations, can be treated on an outpatient basis.
- Treat all guinea pigs in the household.
- Thorough cleaning of the environment is extremely important for eliminating infestation; adult mites can live in the environment and cause reinfestation. Remove and discard all organic material from cage (wood or paper products, bedding); replace bedding with shredded paper bedding that can be discarded and the cage thoroughly cleaned every day during the treatment period.
- Combs, brushes, and grooming utensils—discard or thoroughly disinfect before reuse

## MEDICATIONS

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered all-inclusive.

- Common treatments include injections of ivermectin or topical spot-on products such as selamectin (Revolution) or imidocloprid/moxidectin (Advantage-Multi). Several treatments are usually needed to eliminate infestation. Cleaning of the environment and treating all in-contact guinea pigs are critical for treatment success.
- Some guinea pigs with scabies mites have secondary bacterial skin infections and may require treatment with antibiotics.
- Severe scabies infestations cause general debility, weight loss, and sometimes seizures. Hospitalization for IV fluids, anticonvulsive medications, and general supportive care may be necessary.

## FOLLOW-UP

### PATIENT MONITORING

- A decrease in flaking and itchiness indicates the infestation is being controlled.
- Reinfestation may indicate contact with a carrier guinea pig, or the presence of an unidentified source of mites (e.g., untreated bedding).

### PREVENTION/AVOIDANCE

Avoid contact with infected pets and bedding.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Recurrent infestation
- With scabies mite—debility, weight loss, uncontrolled seizures, and death
- A rash may develop on humans in areas of contact with the pet. This rash is self-limiting with removal of the mite from pets and the environment.

### EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- For chewing lice, the prognosis is good if the guinea pig, the environment, and all in-contact pets are treated.
- For scabies mites, prognosis ranges from good (with diligent cleaning of the environment) in mild or early infestations, to grave with heavy infestation and debilitated animals.

## KEY POINTS

- Scabies mites should be identified and treated early to prevent severe debility and seizures that can accompany heavy infestations.
- Chewing lice generally cause mild hair loss and flaking.
- Eliminating mites can be challenging and requires treating the guinea pig, the environment, and all in-contact guinea pigs. Treatment failures are common if just the animal is treated.
- With scabies mites, a rash may develop on humans in areas of contact with the pet. This rash is self-limiting with removal of the mite from pets and the environment.

# Notes

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