



Chapter 039, Anatomy, Physiology, and Behavior (American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine)

Mark Suckow

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NOTE: This is a single chapter excerpted from the book *The Laboratory Rabbit, Guinea Pig, Hamster, and Other Rodents*, made available for individual purchase. Additional chapters, as well as the entire book, may be purchased separately.

Chinchillas possess several key anatomic, physiologic, and behavioral characteristics which in many ways are adaptations derived from their evolution in the high Andean mountains of South America. Chinchillas are useful animal models for a number of human diseases. This chapter discusses certain features in detail such as biological characteristics and behavioral patterns of chinchillas while treating other attributes only briefly, so that key differences can be explored in sufficient detail while leaving other sources to discuss systems in common with other mammals. Chinchillas weigh an average of 400–600 gm and their bodies, about 12–14 inches long, are short, stocky, and compact. The organ systems of chinchillas are essentially similar to those of most other mammals. However, they have unique biological attributes, which may either influence approaches to their medical care or demonstrate their value as research animals. Chinchillas are described as gentle, docile, quiet, and timid. They use their mouths to explore, and may perform trial bites when exploring an object or person. They also gnaw regularly similar to other rodents. Chinchillas are naturally nocturnal, being active at dusk and at night in the wild, but in captivity they can adapt to a diurnal lifestyle. They are active and agile, and enjoy climbing and jumping.

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