

POTBELLIED PIG HUSBANDRY AND NUTRITION

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When Vietnamese potbellied pigs were first introduced to the pet scene in the United States, their exorbitant price tags (some breeding pairs sold for \$10,000) restricted their ownership to a serious few. With increased popularity and therefore increased numbers, their prices fell, and potbellied pigs now frequently suffer the fate of many inexpensive, exotic, or novel pets. A price tag of \$20 or less means that, oftentimes, little or no planning is done before purchasing the pet. Without the proper knowledge of the potbellied pigs' husbandry and nutritional needs, health and behavior problems are inevitable. In the author's experience, approximately 50% of pet potbellied pigs are abandoned or re-homed before they are 1 year of age. This occurs usually as a result of unrealistic expectations of the owners and their unwillingness or inability to provide for the pig's environmental needs. The most common misconception held by pet pig owners is that the potbellied pig will weigh only 40 to 50 lb when fully grown. When the pet pig reaches the more realistic, average weight of 120 lb, the pet owner is often disappointed and rapidly loses interest in this pet that failed to live up to their expectations. Prevention of these problems, therefore, is dependent on the prospective pet owner being properly informed—before the purchase of such a pet—about potbellied pig care, including how to feed and exercise it appropriately and how to provide it with the proper environment for its physical and mental well being. The veterinarian who is knowledgeable about the needs of the potbellied pig can be an important resource for the potential or the first-time pet pig owner.

From Premier Veterinary Services, Fort Worth, Texas

VETERINARY CLINICS OF NORTH AMERICA:
EXOTIC ANIMAL PRACTICE

THE SIZE MYTH

When Keith Connell of Oshawa, Ontario imported the first 16 Vietnamese potbellied pigs in 1985, they were all approximately 1 year of age and under 100 lb. It was believed by most who then began breeding potbellied pigs that they would remain in the 60- to 70-lb range. What most people did not realize is that although the pig has been bred to reach early sexual maturity (at approximately 3 to 4 months of age) it does not reach full size until 2 to 3 years of age. This fact may have led to the original confusion about the size of the Vietnamese potbellied pig and probably still contributes to unethical breeders misleading potential purchasers. When shopping for a potbellied pig, if the only adult that the potential buyer sees is a 6- to 12-month-old female sow with her litter of tiny piglets, the buyer might easily be led to believe that the pig purchased will only grow as large as that sow. This buyer is likely to be very disappointed when that pig grows to its proper size of 100 to 120 lb.

Many people are also confused by the term "miniature" when used to describe the Vietnamese potbellied pig. The author has talked with many potbellied pig owners who disdainfully commented that their pet pig was "supposed to have been a miniature." Explaining to them that a commercial hog can reach weights of 600 to 700 lb and that therefore their potbellied pig is in fact miniature at a weight of 100 lb does not help the situation much because the owners are already disappointed at the failure of the pet to live up to their expectations. To further demonstrate how important perceptions and expectations can be, the author is even aware of a pet owner who abandoned a lovely 70-lb potbellied pig because "it got too big." The owner had been led to believe that the pig would maximally weigh only 30 to 40 lb!

To further complicate the issue, currently, there are breeders of potbellied pigs advertising "micro-mini" and "mini-mini" pigs that are supposed to remain under 30 lb when fully grown. As of this writing, no 2-year-old potbellied pig weighing under 50 lb has ever been shown in a show sanctioned by the North American Potbellied Pig Association. In the author's experience, the few pigs that have presented as "micro-mini" or "mini-mini" have not lived longer than 1 year of age because of numerous genetic defects and related health problems (Fig. 1). The author also knows of one pig that appeared to have been accidentally starved to death by an owner who believed she was feeding it appropriately "to keep it small."

Pet owners must be made aware that two things affect a pig's size: nutrition and genetics. Starving a pig only succeeds in creating a malnourished, unhealthy pet (Fig. 2). A properly fed pig simply grows to its genetically predetermined frame size, while maintaining a normal, healthy amount of body fat. A pig that is fed a diet too high in fat and protein (for example, dog or cat food) can exceed its genetic potential and achieve a larger frame size as well as store an extraordinary amount of fat.

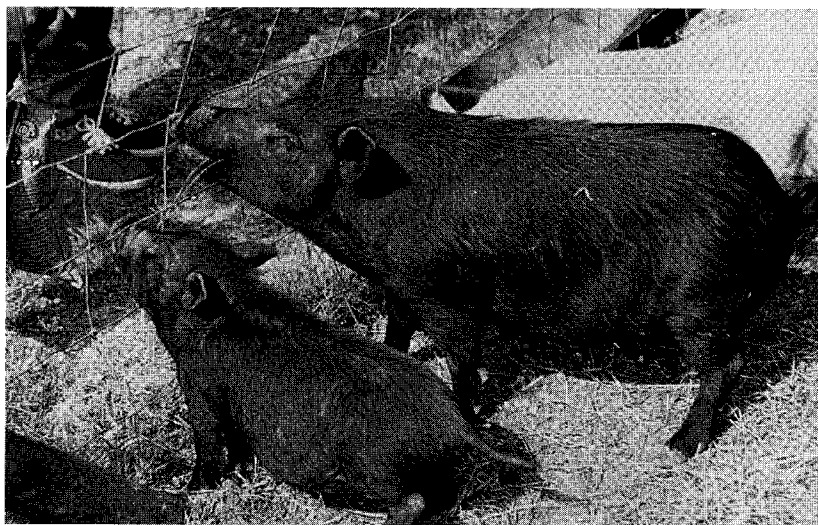


Figure 1. Two 9-month old littermates. The pig on the left is stunted due to malnourishment and chronic illness.

The breed standards established by the North American Potbellied Pig Association (NAPPA, 408 14th Street SW, Ruskin, FL 33570) describe a pig weighing no more than 95 lb and having a maximum height of 18 in at the shoulder, **at 1 year of age**. In the author's experience, the average, fully grown potbellied pig weighs approximately 120 lbs. Most adult potbellied pigs weighing more than that are overweight.

NUTRITION

The most common nutritional disease of potbellied pigs is obesity (Fig. 3). However, many stunted and malnourished pigs are also seen owing to their owner's misguided attempt to keep their pet pig small. Proper feeding of the pet potbellied pig is easier now than ever before because of the number of companies that have developed diets specifically for miniature pigs (see Appendix). Potbellied pigs should never be fed commercial hog feeds because they are formulated to produce rapid growth in a relatively short time. Feeds for miniature pigs are lower in protein and fat and have a higher fiber content than commercial swine feed.

Potbellied pigs should be fed according to their stage of growth and their reproductive status. Manufacturers of miniature pig feeds have developed different foods to meet the different requirements of pet pigs at these life stages. Miniature pig feeds are generally classified as starter, grower, breeder, or maintenance. Starter feeds are typically formulated



Figure 2. Underfed pig. Note the gaunt, angular appearance.

to feed newly weaned pigs. They usually contain approximately 20% protein, 5% to 6% fat, and 2.5% to 3% fiber. Grower feeds are lower in protein and fat and contain an increased level of fiber and were developed to feed the pig from weaning to 4 to 6 months of age. Breeder rations usually contain at least 16% protein, 2% to 3% fat, and 11% to 15% fiber. Breeder rations are formulated to feed the gestating, lactating, or extremely active miniature pig.

The most appropriate rations to use for the average pet potbellied pig are maintenance rations containing approximately 12% protein, 2% fat, and 12% to 15% fiber. If an approximately 8-week-old pet pig is adopted by a new owner, the pet owner should never need to feed the pig starter rations. Most pet pigs are spayed or neutered within their first few months of life and begin to lead very sedentary lifestyles right away. These pets rarely need the high levels of fat and protein in grower rations, so the author recommends that most pet pigs be started on maintenance rations upon entering their new home.



Figure 3. Three dangerously obese pigs.

Cystitis, with or without crystalluria, is a common genitourinary disease of potbellied pigs. Availability of drinking water appears to play the most crucial role in preventing this problem, but diet may also play an important role. A high urine pH may help promote bacteriuria and crystalluria.⁹

High-carbohydrate diets, such as those fed to potbellied pigs, promote a high urine pH. In response to this problem, some commercially prepared potbellied pig feeds now contain urinary acidifiers to help prevent cystitis.

A variety of different recommendations have been made as to the amount of feed to give potbellied pigs. Some references suggest that pet pigs be fed 2% to 2.5% of their body weight daily.^{5, 11} Other references suggest a daily feeding of 1 cup of feed per 50 to 80 lb of the pig's weight.³ These general guidelines aside, pet pig owners must be taught to feed their pet pigs according to their body composition! Although the potbellied pig should have a rotund potbelly, they should not have turgid, fat-filled jowls or rolls of fat hanging over their hocks (Figs. 4 and 5). They should have ribs that can be felt but not seen.

Food treats are an important part of training the pet pig. However, treats should not be given out freely. They are something the pig should have to earn. Pigs show a preference for sweet foods, so pet owners must be cautioned to use common sense when choosing treats for their pig. Because of the pig's tendency to obesity, cookies, candies, and chips should never be fed to pigs. Appropriate treats for the pig include low-fat, low-salt snack foods such as dry cereals, popcorn (air popped without any butter or salt is best), and small amounts of dried or fresh fruit. Requiring that the pig earns its treats is one way of continually reinforcing the pig's position as a subordinate member of the family. Pet owners



Figure 4. An overweight pig. Note the turgid jowls and rolls of fat on forehead and hocks.

may need to be reminded that treats, no matter how low in fat and calories, still contribute to the daily caloric intake of their pet pig.

Once a pig is allowed to become obese, weight loss is extremely difficult. The author has known of obese (150 lb) pigs receiving as little as 1/4 cup of feed twice daily and still maintaining their weight. It appears that they can do this primarily because of their inactivity. Their bodies' metabolism probably slows in an attempt to maintain body

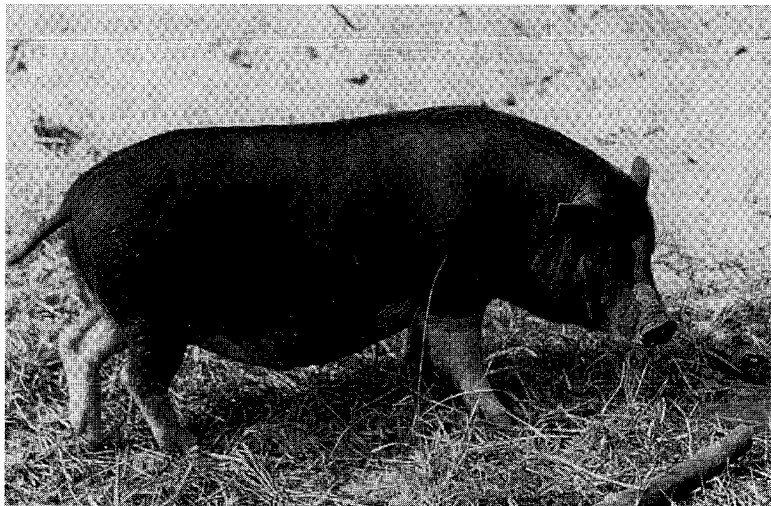


Figure 5. Not a show champion, but a pet pig of normal weight.

weight under perceived famine conditions. The ability of the pig to do this most likely accounted for their original popularity as food animals.

Nevertheless, in the author's opinion, obesity is likely to be the leading cause of health problems and decreased life span in pet pigs. Arthritis, heart disease, and kidney failure are just a few possible geriatric diseases that may be hastened by obesity in the pig.⁴ Obese pigs often develop such thick rolls of fat on their face and around their eyes that they cannot see. Oftentimes an entropion actually results, and the pig may need surgery to prevent damage to the cornea (Fig. 6). However, the pig must be started on a program of diet and exercise as well, because without concurrent weight loss, the problem can redevelop. Obviously, the heightened anesthetic risk in these obese patients is also a real concern.

NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCIES

Nutritional deficiencies are very uncommon in pet pigs fed a commercially prepared diet. However, potbellied pigs are subject to most of the nutritional diseases of commercial swine when fed inappropriate diets such as table scraps or single-ingredient diets such as corn or oats.

Vitamin E and selenium deficiencies are of most concern in the potbellied pig because deficiencies may occur even when the pet is fed a commercial miniature pig ration.⁴ Vitamin E is unstable and may be depleted by the time an entire bag of feed is consumed. Supplementation of vitamin E and selenium are recommended on a routine basis but must be done with caution. Toxicity can result from oversupplementation. The easiest way for a pet owner to supplement vitamin E and selenium is

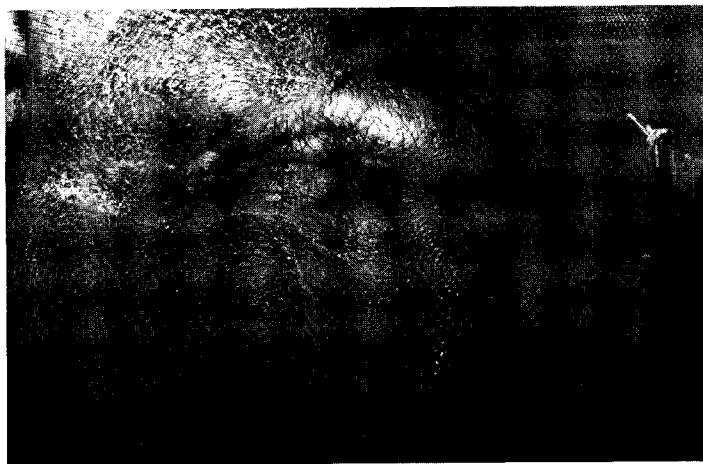


Figure 6. Entropion secondary to obesity.

with a product made especially for potbellied pigs such as the one made by Heartland Animal Health, Inc., Fair Play, MO. However, vitamin E can be supplemented by giving the vitamin E capsules available at most pharmacies. Vitamin E can be given at 50 IU daily or at 200 IU every 4 days.⁴ With any method of supplementation, clients must be warned of the dangers of toxicity if they oversupplement their pet's diet!

WATER

Water is an important nutrient for all animals, including swine. However, the pig has some unique behaviors that may dictate how water is provided. If allowed, pigs will alternate between eating and drinking until satisfied.^{1, 12} This pattern of moving back and forth between water bowl and food bowl creates a lot of spillage, often resulting in the pet owner's restricting water availability to the pig. This problem should be solved, not by restricting the pig's water, but rather by providing its food and water in an easy-to-clean environment. Some owners of pet pigs feed and water their pig in a shower stall or a large shallow tray that can contain the spillage.

Pigs may also attempt to upend their water bowls so that they can play or soak in the water. Heavy, nontip bowls are needed to prevent this. Water for soaking and cooling should also be provided for the pig living in an outdoor environment. Water for soaking should be provided in a separate container from drinking water. Plastic wading pools are ideal for this purpose. If a pig housed outdoors in the heat of the summer spills its water bowl to cool itself, the resultant water deprivation can lead to illness and even death.

Pet potbellied pigs appear to be somewhat particular about the temperature of their drinking water. During hot summer weather, if the water in their bowls becomes extremely warm, many pigs will consume less water than they should unless the water is freshened regularly. During the winter when the water in outdoor water bowls becomes extremely cold, some pigs will not drink adequate amounts of water. Pet owners may need to be reminded of this particular aspect of pig behavior and encouraged to monitor their pig's water consumption carefully during extreme weather conditions.

Restricting the pig's water has the potential to cause many health problems. Urolithiasis and cystitis are not uncommon problems in swine and may be related to decreased water intake. Salt poisoning (sodium ion toxicosis) can affect potbellied pigs as well as commercial swine and is caused by water deprivation.⁶ The importance of providing fresh drinking water to the pet pig at all times cannot be overstressed!

Another unique aspect of the pig's drinking behavior is that water intake appears to be regulated by abdominal fill.¹³ A pig that is fed a restricted amount of food will drink substantially more water. The primary implications of this behavior are for housebreaking: when the pet

pig owner overly restricts the pig's food, it may become polyuric and polydipsic thus making housebreaking difficult for the young pig.

INGESTIVE BEHAVIOR

The pig is a foraging animal that spends much of its day either in search of food or at rest.¹² When kept as a pet and fed two to three small meals daily, the pig may spend as little as 20 minutes a day eating. The pig's remaining time is often spent sleeping. The result of this pattern of activity is that the pet pig becomes an extremely sedentary animal, prone to obesity. There are a variety of ways that mealtime can be extended for the pet pig, thus increasing the amount of exercise they receive, as well as making them a more active participant in the acquisition of their food. When weather permits, the pet owner can simply broadcast the pig's ration over the grass in the yard. The pig's feeding time is then greatly increased. For the pet pig living in the house with no yard available, either a rooting box can be constructed of wood or a plastic wading pool can be used. The bottom of the box should be covered with a layer of large, smooth stones such as river rocks. The pig's ration can then be scattered among the stones. The pig thus fed often spends hours of its time rooting through the box, long after the food is gone; again, its activity level is increased. Other useful tools for occupying the pig's time include the Manna Ball (Be Sure Training, PO Box 225, Carnation, WA, 98014), Buster Cubes, and other such tools. These are devices constructed with strategically placed holes in them. The pig's ration can be placed inside, allowing the pig to manipulate the toys and thus slowly acquire its food.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT

The two most important concerns when housing pet potbellied pigs are the temperature in the environment and the pet pig's need for environmental enrichment. Adult pet potbellied pigs are most comfortable when environmental temperatures range between 65° F (18° C) and 75° F (24° C).⁸ Pigs are unable to sweat, so it is difficult for them to cool themselves. In addition, the Vietnamese potbellied pig has a relatively small heart that also contributes to its susceptibility to extreme heat and exertion.⁸ Pigs housed outdoors need access to fresh water in which to cool themselves. Plastic wading pools with just a few inches of water in the bottom allow the pig to lie down to cool off. Cutting a low entryway in the side of the pool makes it easier for the pig to step in and out of the pool. If fresh water is not available, pigs will attempt to make a wallow by spilling their water dish. Potbellied pigs have relatively sensitive skin and can sunburn, so those housed outdoors need plenty of shade available, as well.

Potbellied pigs are also sensitive to extreme cold; so, a dry, draft-

free shelter must be provided for the pig living outdoors during cool weather. Plenty of clean, dry bedding aids in keeping the pig warm in its shelter. Hay, straw, and pine shavings are a few of the more commonly used bedding materials.⁸ Pigs are excellent "bed makers" and can completely cover themselves with this bedding material. During extremely cold weather, a heat lamp placed high and out of reach inside the pig's shelter may be necessary to keep the pet pig warm. Commercial pig heating blankets are also available and may be safer than heat lamps.

When potbellied pigs were first introduced in this country, they were widely touted as terrific house pets. Housing potbellied pigs strictly indoors has been the subject of much debate lately, with many claiming that potbellied pigs should not be kept in the house. This debate is caused mostly by the rise in the numbers of pigs being abandoned due to behavior problems. It is the author's belief that the pet pig can make an excellent house pet as long as its need for environmental enrichment is met. Providing the pig with the proper, stimulating environment indoors is a challenge that few pet owners go to the effort to meet. All house pigs should be allowed some outdoor time in which to exercise. Pigs that spend some time outdoors are also more likely to have healthier coats and hooves.

When housing a pig indoors, pet owners need to be aware of the pig's susceptibility to leg injuries and minimize its exposure to slippery flooring. If the pig must be housed in a room with a linoleum or tile floor (for ease of cleaning) providing the pig with plenty of blankets or other bedding material that can be scattered around may help the pig's footing. Old blankets, comforters, sleeping bags, and even bean bag chairs have been used as bedding for pet pigs, but, more important, they give the pig objects to root and manipulate with their nose.

Many pet owners who house potbellied pigs indoors expect them to use a litter pan for their eliminations. Potbellied piglets can be trained to use a litter pan; however, in the author's experience, most older pigs prefer to go outside to eliminate if given the choice. If a pet pig is expected to use a litter pan into adulthood, the pet owner must be sure that the box is not only large enough for the pig to get inside but also large enough for the pig to turn itself around. The sides of the box must not be so high that it is awkward or uncomfortable for the pig to enter. If the box is at all difficult for the pig to use, the pig will find another, easier place in which to eliminate. Obviously, finding a litter pan large enough for a 150-lb pig can be a challenge, so one must be imaginative. A child's plastic wading pool with an entryway cut out of the side or a plastic concrete-mixing container are just two examples of containers that can be used as litter pans for adult pigs. The potbellied pig's sensitivity to cold may make it loathe to go outdoors to eliminate in inclement weather and can result in the pig eliminating on the floor in the home. Having a litter box available throughout the pig's life can serve as an excellent backup.

ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

A unique aspect of the pig's behavior is its apparent curiosity and subsequent drive to explore its environment. The pig's curiosity is usually directed towards items at floor level that are then investigated by rooting, sniffing, and nibbling.⁷ If given the opportunity, pigs will spend a large portion of their day exploring. Many pet pig owners confuse this behavior with hunger, when in fact the pig is simply satisfying its curiosity about its surroundings. In the pig confined to the house, this behavior can lead to carpet and linoleum being torn from the floor, clothing removed from closets and even paint and drywall peeled from the walls. The author knows of a pig that removed books from the lower shelves of all of the bookshelves while the owner was away. Most pigs can learn to open refrigerators, cabinets, and drawers with their unique snout. It is the author's opinion that pigs deprived of this ability to exhibit their normal species-typical behavior are more likely to develop intolerable behavior problems. Therefore, if the pet pig is to be a pleasant pet to have in the home, environmental enrichment, primarily aimed at providing the pig with things it can manipulate, is a necessity.

The pig's rooting behavior can also lead to destruction of lawns and landscaping. The prospective pig owner should be aware of this before purchasing a pet pig. If a well-manicured lawn is important to the owner, she or he should be prepared to fence a separate area for the pig where it will be free to landscape as it sees fit. The author does not recommend placing rings in the noses of potbellied pigs to prevent what is normal behavior. The practice is inhumane and seldom effective.

Environmental enrichment for the pet pig need only be limited by the pet owner's imagination. As mentioned previously, a rooting box can extend the pig's feeding time by forcing it to "hunt" for its food. This is a form of environmental enrichment. Blankets and other forms of bedding can also provide a pig with needed rooting materials. Newspapers, cardboard boxes, and grocery bags are all items that a pig can safely destroy, again keeping the pig busy for some time. Many sturdy children's toys can provide a pig with hours of entertainment as long as there are no small parts that the pig can remove and ingest. Clients should also be reminded that teaching the pig tricks is a form of environmental enrichment. The pig has great capacity for learning, and challenging it to learn new behaviors offers the owner the opportunity to praise the pig for exhibiting desired behaviors while hopefully decreasing its opportunities to exhibit unwanted behaviors.

SKIN CARE

Dry, flaky skin is a common condition of pet potbellied pigs and may lead to excessive itching and apparent discomfort for the pig. However, many potbellied pigs have some degree of flaky skin, leading one to question whether the condition is truly abnormal or merely

reflects normal pig skin physiology.⁵ Dietary deficiencies, dry environmental conditions, and internal or external parasites should all be considered differential diagnosis for dry skin in the pet pig.¹⁰

Fat is the most restricted component of pet pig rations, so fatty-acid supplementation is frequently initiated if the pet pig is already being fed a commercial miniature pig feed. Fatty-acid supplements such as those used to treat dogs with allergic skin disease have been effective in improving skin condition in many pet pigs. There are also fatty-acid products available that were developed strictly for use in the potbellied pig (Heartland Animal Health, Inc., 363 Highway 32, Fair Play, MO 65649).

Topical application of products, such as the humectants used to treat dry skin in dogs and humans, are also often used on potbellied pigs with varying degrees of success. Pet owners should be cautioned against the overuse of oily skin products on their pig. They cause dust and dirt to stick to the pig's skin and may lead to further skin irritation.

Frequent brushing with a coarse bristle brush also helps to remove dry flakes of skin and leads to a shinier, healthier skin, but because many potbellied pigs have never been trained to allow brushing, the owner is unable to do this. It is normal body care behavior for pigs to scratch themselves on inanimate objects in their environment.⁷ This may play an important role in removing dead skin.

HOOF CARE

Lameness problems are common in the pet potbellied pig, and, if not directly caused by poor confirmation, are often caused by poor husbandry. Obesity and overgrown hooves, alone or in combination, may contribute to lameness in the pig (Fig. 7). Obesity places extra weight on the potbellied pig's small legs and joints, leading to degenerative joint disease. Pet pigs may get little exercise and frequently spend most of their time on soft surfaces that do not contribute to hoof wear. Most all pet pigs will need their hooves trimmed by the time they reach 2 to 3 years of age. The frequency that their hooves will need trimming is dependent on the wear that the hoof receives and the strength of the individual pig's hooves. White hooves appear to be softer than black hooves, so they wear down easier and need less frequent trimming. Annual trimming is adequate for most pet pigs but some require trimming on a biannual basis.

Occasionally, pet pig owners will train their pig to accept hoof trimming from a young age. However, most pet owners do not, so the veterinarian will be required to trim the hooves while the pig is under anesthesia. Anesthesia protocols for the potbellied pig have been documented elsewhere, but in the author's experience, isoflurane anesthesia is the safest and allows the pig to recover quickly.

Trimming the pig's hooves can be easily accomplished with a small pair of horse hoof trimmers. The feet can then be smoothed and shaped

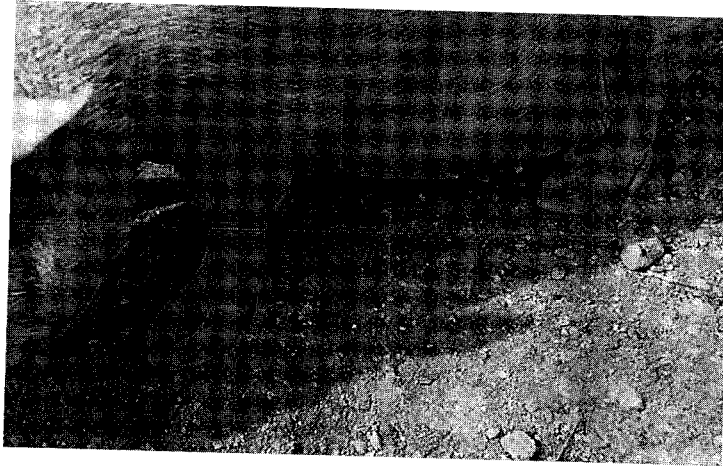


Figure 7. An obese pig with severely overgrown hooves. Note how the pig's feet are hyperextended with increased pressure on the heels.

with a sanding disc on a Dremel Moto-Tool (Racine, WI). Do not forget to trim the dewclaws. Since they do not come in contact with the ground, they receive virtually no wear and can grow quite long and pointed. Care should be taken to avoid the vasculature of the hoof, which can extend into the hoof wall in pigs that have extremely overgrown hooves. As with trimming dog nails, it simply takes practice to recognize the appearance of the "quick" to stop trimming immediately before reaching it.

Primarily because of the anesthesia and the cost involved, many pet pig owners will request that the hooves be trimmed as short as is reasonably possible, to avoid too-frequent trimming. With that in mind, the author has "quicked" a number of pigs in an attempt to regain a normal shape in a drastically overgrown and malformed hoof. The pigs, thus "quicked," recovered and walked immediately without any apparent signs of discomfort and have, to the author's knowledge, never suffered any untoward side effects from the trimming. In fact, in the author's experience, the only pigs that have suffered apparent pain or discomfort after trimming are those that have been trimmed while awake, without the benefit of anesthesia. These pigs appear to suffer primarily from rough handling and the poorly trimmed hoof that is a result of the "rodeo."

Proper hoof care is just one more reason that pet pig owners should be encouraged to harness and leash train their potbellied pig when it is small and easier to handle. A potbellied pig that can be taken on walks on concrete surfaces will be less likely to become obese, and the wear on its hooves will decrease the need for professional hoof trimming. The inability to take the pet pig for walks should be taken into account when designing their housing. Concrete paving stones, placed strategically so

that the pig must walk over them daily, can also help to keep the pig's hooves worn down.

TUSK CARE

Potbellied pigs have canine teeth that continue to grow throughout their lifetime. These teeth are commonly referred to as the tusks.³ The upper tusks grow almost straight out whereas the lower tusks curve out and backwards. Male hormone stimulates the growth of the tusks so that boars' tusks grow longer and thicker than those of sows, castrated males, or "spayed" females. However, the rate of growth and the size of the tusk differs from individual to individual and some castrated male pigs require tusk trimming as frequently as intact pigs. These tusks rub against each other in such a way as to develop very sharp, dangerous edges. Even the most well-mannered of pigs can accidentally harm people and other pets with these tusks. Affectionate pigs have been known to slice through a pant leg and the underlying skin, simply by rubbing their head against someone's leg. For pet pig owners that keep their pig indoors, these tusks can also prove quite damaging to furniture and flooring.

To prevent accidents and injuries, one may need to have the pet pig's tusks trimmed at 6- to 12-month intervals, depending on the individual. However, the pet owner should always be asked about tusk trimming first. Many owners of potbellied pigs find the tusks an endearing part of their pig's appearance and do not want the tusks trimmed short. As long as the client is cautioned about the potential dangers, "to trim or not to trim" must remain the client's decision.

Tusk trimming should be performed with the pig under anesthesia. A cutting blade on a Dremel tool or a high-speed dental tool can be used to cut the tooth even with the gum line. The author then uses a sanding stone on the Dremel tool to remove any sharp edges, leaving a rounded "button." Gigli's wire can also be used to cut the tusk.² Bolt cutters or other crushing-type tools should never be used to cut the tusks, because they can cause the tooth to fracture longitudinally, leading to infection and pain.²

SUMMARY

Vietnamese potbellied pigs, when appropriately cared for, make excellent pets for some people. However, their proper housing, care, and training is more challenging to the average person than that required for most traditional pets, such as dogs and cats. Failure to feed and house the pet pig appropriately results in the most common health and behavior problems. The obese, intractable pet pig gives little pleasure to a pet owner and appears to lead a very poor-quality life, frequently leading to the pet pig being given away or worse. Preventing health and

behavior problems is easy if pet owners are armed with correct information early, either before or immediately after their acquisition of a pet pig. A veterinarian prepared to share this information can save the lives of many pigs as well as keep clients happy and coming back.

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APPENDIX

**Some Manufacturers of Feeds for
Miniature Pigs**

Heartland Animal Health, Inc.
363 Highway 32
Fair Play, MO 65649
800-325-8414

Manna Pro Corporation
7711 Carondelet Ave., Suite 800
St. Louis, MO 63105
800-690-9908

Purina Mills, Inc.
P.O. Box 66812
St. Louis, MO 63166
800-227-8941

Ross Mill Farm's
Champion's Choice
P.O. Box 498
Rushland, PA 18956
215-322-1539