

HAMSTER CARE



Hamsters make active, inquisitive pets. With proper care they can reach 2-3 years of age, though some individuals may live longer. Hamsters are naturally nocturnal animals.

SPECIES OF PET HAMSTERS

1. Syrian Hamster

- Also known as the 'Golden' or 'Teddy bear' hamster, these are the most commonly kept, and largest species of pet hamster. They come in multiple color varieties. 'Black bear' hamsters are a variety of Syrian hamster. Syrian hamsters should always be housed separately.

2. Dwarf Hamster

- Also known as the 'Russian dwarf', 'Siberian' or 'Djungarian' hamsters. They are commonly grey or white colored. Russian dwarf hamsters are relatively tame, and non aggressive compared with other species. They are colonial and can be housed in single sex family groups.

3. Chinese Hamster

- Also known as 'the stripe back' hamster, they are smaller than the Syrian hamsters and are typically dark brown colored. The males are larger than the females. This hamster species is aggressive and should always be housed singly.

ENCLOSURE

Hamsters enjoy their space! Large cages with multiple levels and solid plastic flooring are ideal to give them plenty of room to explore and play. The cage should be kept in an area of the

house that does not get above 26C degrees; room temperature (21C) is ideal. Drafts should be avoided, as should extended exposure to direct sunlight.

Hamsters love to burrow and we recommend providing a small heap of dust free hay in one corner of the cage for enrichment purposes.

Hamsters should be provided hides where they can sleep undisturbed.

A variety of toys are available on the market. Items to chew on, as well as move around and play with will keep your hamster entertained as happy when you're not around. Many hamsters enjoy running in plastic balls outside their cage for short periods of time- make sure they are always adequately supervised. Wheels are another great option and should always have solid plastic bases to prevent injuries.

BEDDING

The bedding should be changed entirely at least once weekly, with wet and messy spots being spot cleaned daily. The ammonia fumes in dirty cages predispose rodents to respiratory infections.

1-2 inches of soft paper bedding they can dig into such as 'care fresh' or newspaper should be used as substrate. Wood shavings and corn cob bedding should be avoided as they are dustier and can cause significant irritation to the air ways.

DIET

The basis of a good hamster diet is a high quality complete pelleted feed. We recommend 'Oxbow's Healthy Handfuls' as an excellent pelleted choice for your pet. Seed mixes are unbalanced and can predispose to vitamin A and E deficiencies. Your hamster will also just pick out his favorite pieces and leave the rest! Seed should only be given as an occasional treat. In addition, hamsters can be given a limited amount of fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as grains and the occasional starch such as pasta or rice. Yoghurt drops should only be given as very occasional treats.

Fresh water should be available to hamsters at all times. A hanging water bottle on the side of the cage is easiest to keep clean. The water should be replaced daily, and the water bottle should be run through the dish washer several times a week. Check the bottle daily to make sure the ball stopper does not become stuck in the opening- a stuck ball will prevent the hamster from being able to drink.

SOCIALISATION

Hamsters can become very tame with regular gentle handling. They will tend to be less grumpy if handled after they have woken up in the evenings.

Hamsters do not typically enjoy having cage mates and can fight viciously. They are perfectly happy being kept as solitary animals. The exception would be Russian Dwarf hamsters that are sometimes kept in same sex colonies.

COMMON MEDICAL ISSUES

Hamsters are prey species in the wild, they will therefore always do their best to hide any signs of illness so they do not look vulnerable to predators. The slightest change in your hamster's normal behavior could be indicate they are feeling unwell. Prompt veterinary attention is very important to give your hamster the best chance of making a full recovery.

1. **'WET TAIL'**-Wet tail is a diarrhea syndrome that can be caused by a variety of bacterial and parasitic infections. Diarrhea is an EMERGENCY in a hamster and always warrants veterinary attention.
2. **RESPIRATORY DISEASE**- Sniffles, sneezing, coughing, discharge from the eyes and nose, can all be signs your hamster is developing a respiratory infection. Respiratory infections need to be treated by a veterinarian as soon as possible. Poor diet, dirty cages and dusty bedding all predispose hamsters to developing respiratory infections.
3. **OBESITY & HEART DISEASE**-Hamsters are prone to weight problems, which can also contribute to heart disease. A good diet and plenty of exercise can reduce the risk of heart disease and other medical problems.
4. **PARASITES** -Hamsters can have a number of parasites infestations; both internal parasites and in their skin and fur. Some of these are capable of being transmitted to humans. Your hamster should have a stool examination performed yearly for intestinal parasites and should be checked out by your veterinarian if you notice any hair loss, scratching or itching,