



Exotic Animal Hospital

of Philadelphia

Care of Gerbil

You got a new gerbil? Congratulations!

Please refer to this handout in helping you set your new gerbil up for success as most of the diseases and emergency presentations to the veterinary hospital stem from improper husbandry and could be avoided.

Did you know?

- Gerbil are inquisitive but nervous at first and require gentle handling at their pace.
- The most common type of gerbil seen are Mongolian gerbil.
- Gerbils on average including the tail are about 12-14cm long, with a characteristic tuft of hair at the end of the tail.
- The average lifespan of most pet gerbils is 2-4 years.
- Gerbils are mainly nocturnal, becoming more active in the evenings and during the night, but can have some normal daytime activities .
- Gerbils are generally sociable and can do well housed together, if raised together. Breeding pairs are usually housed together for life.
- Unlike mice, gerbils tails are not as strong and should not be handled by their tails as the skin is prone to sloughing off.



Enclosure:

- Provide the largest cage possible for your pet gerbil.
- Rodents are notorious chewers so cages of stainless steel, durable plastic, or wire are recommended.
 - Avoid caging constructed from wood or soft metal.
- A cage should have a solid plastic base with closely spaced metal bars for both containment and ventilation purposes. Avoid chain-link or mesh types of flooring as gerbils can easily injure their feet.
 - Aquariums are inappropriate due to poor ventilation
- Provide enrichment in the form of tunnels, exercise wheels, and nest boxes to maintain the mental well being of your pet. Old paper towels or toilet paper tubes and wood gnaws can be used as toys and give your pet something constructive to chew on.

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- Provide ample nesting material and deep bedding for burrowing, resting, and to soak up urine. Select clean, absorbent, non-toxic, and odor free bedding. Recycled paper products (i.e. CareFRESH, Absorption Corp) are preferred.
 - **AVOID** wood shavings, sawdust and corncob bedding as they can cause respiratory irritation and intestinal obstructions
- Also provide shredded paper towels or tissue as nesting material.
 - **Avoid** the commercially available fluffy cotton wool products as these materials are indigestible and can lead to intestinal obstruction if eaten.
- Provide tunnels, exercise wheels, and nest boxes to help maintain the mental well-being of your pet. Offer cardboard tube rolls and wood blocks as chew toys.
- Optimal temperature range for rodents falls between 65-78°F, with a relative humidity of 40-70%.
 - Keep the cage out of direct sunlight and away from other heat sources, such as a radiator, or drafts.
- Gerbils have more concentrated urine and hard dry stools but cleaning of the cage and all cage furniture should be done thoroughly once or twice weekly. Changing the bedding and disinfect all areas of the habitat. Clean food dishes and the water bottle. Plastic and glass housing structures reduce ventilation, and can lead to problems with temperature and odor control, so more frequent cleaning may be necessary.

Diet:

- Offer a rodent ration containing 12-16% protein and 4-6% fat, either in pellet or block form.
 - **Avoid** commercially available seed-based diets as they predispose your gerbil to obesity and nutritional deficiencies.
- Supplement the diet with small amounts of fresh fruit (i.e. apples, bananas, and grapes), raw vegetables, and freshly washed, salad greens.
 - Other occasional treats may include low sugar cereals (i.e. Cheerios®, General Mills; puffed wheat, rice, or millet cereals, or spoon-size shredded wheat), plain popcorn, dry oatmeal, cooked pasta, or whole- wheat bread.
 - **Avoid** cheese as it is high in fat and rodents cannot tolerate large amounts of lactose.
- Provide water in a water bottle. Position the sipper tube low enough to allow the pet easy access. Although gerbils drink only a fraction of the total bottle volume, the bottle should be emptied, cleaned and refilled with fresh water daily.

