

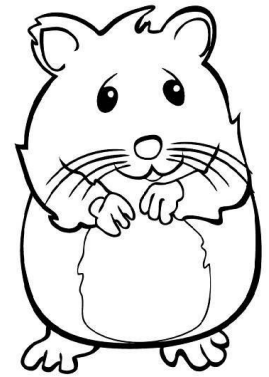


Exotic Animal Hospital of Philadelphia

Hamster Care and Husbandry

You got a new Hamster? Congratulations!

Please refer to this handout in helping you setting your new hammie 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?

- The most common pet hamster is the golden hamster which is also known as the Syrian hamster (*Mesocricetus auretus*).
- Other popular species are the dwarf hamster (Siberian) and the “Teddy Bear” hamster who is a long hair version of the Syrian hamster.
- In the wild Syrian hamsters live in arid or semiarid areas in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. Hamsters are nocturnal (active at night) like all rodents.
- The front paws of hamsters are modified hands, allowing them great dexterity when handling food.
- Hamsters are mainly herbivorous, eating primarily vegetable matter. The large cheek pouch of hamsters enables them to carry large quantities of food in their mouths. This adaptation is useful for the environment in which they live where food occurs irregularly but in great abundance.

Temperament:

- Hamsters generally make fun pets, however if woken up from a sleep, cause it to feel threatened or startled, they **WILL** bite.
- Hamsters are high stress pets and must be handled slowly.
- Hamsters are nocturnal and the noise of an exercise wheel may keep you up at night.
- Hamsters have very poor eyesight, but a great sense of smell and hearing, therefore, a hamster might nibble on a finger that smells of treats.
- One of the most important features of the Golden hamster is its solitary nature.
 - By 10 weeks of age, they will not be able to tolerate the company of another hamster. They must be caged singly.
 - Adults of the same sex will fight if caged together, sometimes inciting deadly wounds.
- Dwarf hamsters are sociable and will live happily in pairs and groups.

- They are best introduced at a young age as older hamsters will not usually accept a new companion, particularly if used to living alone.
- When buying 2 or more Dwarf hamsters to live together, ideally you should pick hamsters that are already living in a group community.
- Expect some squabbling upon introduction, and do not interfere with the fighting unless it is prolonged, or injuries are caused.
- **DO NOT** house different species/subspecies together as their natural ranges do not overlap and they will not get along.

Enclosure:

- Select a cage that is easy to clean, especially if a child is changing the cage (it is not recommended that young children change the cage without supervision by an adult).
- A cage that is escape - proof, non-chewable material such as a light weight plastic bottom tall enough to hold bedding is sufficient, and will allow good ventilation- this is important due to toxic ammonia fumes that will accumulate.
- 20 square inches of floor area for the hamster and a cage height of at least 6 inches. Wire top cages are the most common but hamsters might get their small legs caught in the wires and fracture their legs.
- Glass aquariums are **NOT** recommended due to poor ventilation.
- A new popular cage is a solid enclosed plastic cage with tubular extensions- these can be expanded and taken apart easily for cleaning. (C & C cages)

Bedding:

- Recycled paper products are the most comfortable and commonly used bedding, these can be combined with Timothy hay.
- It is recommended that you **DO NOT** use any cedar/pine/aspens shavings, cat litter or corn cob byproduct as it may attribute to health problems in your hamster such as respiratory disease and impaction..

Water:

- A sipper water bottle affixed to the outside of the cage or a water bowl should be used. The bottle should be filled with fresh water every day and the stopper checked for leaks, hair, bubbles, and mineral deposit plugs.
- Bottles and dishes should be thoroughly cleaned with soapy water followed by bleach once a week. Both should also be dishwasher safe. The sipper portion of the water bottle should be thoroughly scrubbed with a bottle brush to remove any non visible debris. Be sure the bottle and/or dish is rinsed free of all bleach before filling it and returning it to your hamsters cage.

Diet:

- A mixture of seeds and pellets is **NOT** recommended as the hamster will preferentially eat the nutritionally deficient seed over the pellets.

- Give your hamster a pelleted-diet, such as a rodent laboratory block. Your hamster may also enjoy fresh vegetables such as carrots, celery, kale, green peppers, cucumber as well as uncooked pasta.
- **AVOID** foods that are high in sugar/salt or are gas-producing such as: broccoli, cauliflower, raw beans, potato eyes, iceberg lettuce, citrus fruit, green potatoes, tomatoes, garlic, or chocolate. Hamsters have a sensitive digestive tract and can not tolerate high-sugar items such as fruits.
- A handful of timothy hay can be given 2-3 times a week.
- **AVOID** alfalfa hay due to high calcium content.
- Remember to wash all vegetables well before feeding them to your hamster and give small amounts.



Temperature:

- Hamsters do not have sweat glands and are unable to pant, so they do not have an efficient method of heat removal.
- This makes hamsters prone to heat stress and therefore should be kept in a cool area of the house during summer months.
- Your hamsters environment should be between 75°-85°F and 40%-60% humidity.

Exercise Toys:

- Your hamster will use the exercise wheel frequently so be sure to get one that is quiet. Some female hamsters have been known to run up to 10km a night.
- If your hamster has long hair be sure to trim it so it doesn't become entangled in the wheel.
- Check metal wheels for sharp projections.
- Spherical balls although popular can be harmful to the hamster if used around stairwells, direct sunlight, small children, and other pets.

Cage Furniture:

- A hiding place or nesting place should be available for your hamster. Most pet stores provide plastic tubing, houses and huts for hamsters.
- Do not provide any additional material in the house besides the bedding.

Exercise:

- It is **not recommended** that you let your hamster out of its cage to run around the house or outside. Not only are they too small but they are notorious chewers and may chew on wires, carpet and baseboards.
- A solid exercise wheel is preferred to a wire wheel since hamsters can slip and get stuck in a wire wheel and fracture their legs.

Health Care:

- It's highly recommended that you visit your veterinarian shortly after getting your new hamster as hamsters tend to be the least hardy of the small rodents when newly purchased. "Wet Tail" is the term used to describe diarrhea in hamsters and can be fatal if not treated immediately. Death may occur as early as 24 hours after the appearance of symptoms.

Other common reasons to bring your hamster to see a vet are:

Irritability and biting that are out of character for them
Sunken eyes (weight loss/dehydration)
Anorexia- not eating
Diarrhea
Dental disease- malalignment/overgrowth/drooling
Fractures/traumatic injuries/abscesses
Urinary problems including urinary stones
Tumors benign or malignant
Hair loss/excessive drinking & urination

It was a pleasure working with your pet today, please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns

