



HAMSTER CARE TIPS

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LIFESPAN- Hamsters (both dwarf hamster species and Syrian hamsters) live 2-3 years on average.

CAGES— Hamsters need lots of room to burrow and explore. They need a minimum of 2.5 cubic feet of habitat space (e.g. 30"L x 12"H x 12"W). Most store bought cages do not satisfy these requirements, even if they come with lots of tube attachments. A cheap and safe alternative is a clear, large storage bin (~\$10). Here's a great tutorial on making your own bin habitat: <https://www.rachelgothamsters.com/bincagekit>. If using a store bought cage with wire sides, make sure that the bar gap does not exceed 1/4" for dwarf hamsters or 1/2" for Syrian hamsters.

20 gallon long aquariums can be used as habitats, but there are some downsides to using them. They do not allow for any cross-ventilation which can put critters at higher risk for upper respiratory illness. They can also be noisy at night when your hamster is most active. **Any habitat you use should not have wire floors.** These can cause injuries to their feet like bumblefoot.

BEDDING - Soft, paper-based beddings (like Carefresh) are the best option for your hamster. They like deep bedding (3-5") that allows them to burrow, tunnel, and build nests. We do not recommend the use of wood-based bedding as they increase the risk of upper respiratory illness.

FOOD— Hamsters must be fed a hamster and gerbil specific diet that is **free** from any seeds or nuts (they are high in fat, low in nutrition, and not necessary to their daily diet). We recommend a straight-pellet diet like Oxbow, Mazuri, Science Selective, or Full Cheeks (without any nuts or seeds). Your hamster will store food in their cheeks that they will carry to a den in their cage. Check there before filling their dish again.

Treats and healthy snacks help enrich your hamster's life when given in moderation (~1 tablespoon per week). Some healthy options for treats are bananas, apples, berries, carrots, cooked plain eggs, Cheerios, timothy hay, meal worms, plain popcorn, pumpkin seeds, and more. Avoid anything containing dairy, onions (any variety), raw meat, peanuts, walnuts, raisins, poppy seeds, corn, garlic, or anything with added sugars.

HEALTH — Hamsters are sensitive critters that are prone to a number of health issues. Be sure you have a trusted exotic vet that has experience working with pocket pets like hamsters. If you need recommendations for an exotic vet, we would be happy to provide you with one.

Upper Respiratory Illness - symptoms include sneezing, lethargy, heavy breathing, loss of appetite. This is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical attention. To prevent URIs, keep your hamster in a clean, warm (70-76F) environment with adequate ventilation.

Wet Tail - a GI infection causing diarrhea and a dark, damp area near the tail. Symptoms include diarrhea, lethargy, foul smell, and a hunched posture. This is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical attention.

Dental issues (malocclusion) - hamsters, like all rodents, have teeth that grow continuously throughout their lives. They need access to chew toys to help wear their teeth down and prevent them from overgrowing (malocclusion). Signs of dental problems in hamster include drooling, weight loss, pain, or lumps on the face. You must see an exotic vet to have their teeth trimmed, or to check for any health issues that led to your hamster's teeth overgrowing.

ENRICHMENT— Hamsters are adventurous and active creatures. They are **nocturnal**, meaning they sleep all day and are most active at night. They should have access to tunnels, hides, ramps, and toys in their cage to keep busy. If you provide them with a wheel in their habitat, make sure that it is solid (wire-free) to help protect their feet. Most hamsters enjoy human interaction as long as you are patient and gentle with them. Allow them to freely crawl across your hands to build trust. Hand feeding also helps with trust training. To let them burn some energy outside of their cage, a hamster ball is a great investment. Make sure they are safe from stairs, away from other pets, and their ball is securely shut.

SOCIALNEEDS— Hamsters are solitary creatures and should **never** be kept together. Pet stores keep hamsters together in cages because they lack space to keep them separate. They often fight at pet stores and cause serious injuries to each other.