

Small Pet Rodent Awareness Week



Hamster Care Sheet

WHAT IS A HAMSTER?

Hamsters are small rodents and make fascinating pets - they have individual characters and enjoy exploring their surroundings and are generally most active at night and early morning. There are five main domestic breeds: the Syrian (most common and largest), the winter white, the Campbell, the Chinese and the Roborovski.

KEY INFORMATION

- Life span 2-3 years
- Size: 4.5-10 cm depending on the breed.
- Colour: brown/white/black/ginger/sand/grey
- Nocturnal: yes

DIET

Hamsters are omnivores so need a complete hamster food, for example Harry Hamster or Bunny Dwarf Hamster Dream plus fruit & veg in moderation but avoid sugary treat sticks. Hamsters will also eat other foods such as waxworms, mealworms. Hamsters require unlimited fresh water in water bottle with a metal tube or a shallow dish.

ACCOMMODATION

Indoors in a cage - min. size of 80 x 50 cm. For example an Alaska, Barney

Hamsters need a wide but not too tall (to prevent injuries from falling) plastic and wire cage to live in. Examples that are the perfect size and layout are the Savic Plaza or Barney and are available online. Hamsters generally don't smell unless a female in heat, but the toilet area in the cage can have an odour if not regularly changed.

Hamsters need hides, huts, hammocks for sleeping but ensure they don't have small gaps that they could get their feet trapped in - cardboard items are a cheap option. If hamsters become too cold, they can enter a state called torpor (similar to hibernation) and could be mistaken for dead - ensure the room they're kept in doesn't get too hot or cold to prevent distress.

ENRICHMENT

Provide a solid surface exercise wheel - 12" for Syrian's and 8" for dwarf breeds e.g. the trixie/giant Savic Rolly wheel/giant Silent Spinner.

Hamsters love to make a nest/bed so will need paper based bedding (not sawdust) for example Fitch, Carefresh or Megazorb. NEVER use cotton wool type bedding as it can be inhaled and cause death.

Hamsters enjoy time out of their cage but the use of hamster balls is not encouraged - a secure playpen for them would be much better. Hamsters enjoy access to a sand bath as helps to keep their fur clean. They're generally silent unless irritated - some hamsters will grunt if in a bad mood.

HANDLING

Hamsters are generally happy to be handled however the dwarf breeds can be very wriggly and fast, particularly Roborovski's, and can sometimes bite if nervous. They don't have great eyesight so if you have traces of food on your hand, they can sometimes accidentally nip you thinking you're feeding them. Hamsters often stuff their food into their pouches and then hide it in their bed for snacking on later.

Syrian's are the most suitable for children but as hamsters are nocturnal, they may not always be awake when the child wants to handle them. Hamsters can be prone to wet tail so it's best to check for any extra moisture near their rear end on a daily basis as it can be fatal if left untreated.

NEUTERING

Hamsters do not need to be neutered as they're generally solitary animals (Syrian's always are) and there are no health benefits in doing so. Sometimes the dwarf breeds can be kept as a single sex pair but they often become territorial and fall out so then need to be split - neutering males could help reduce this tension but can be quite a risk in terms of the anaesthetic and it's a lot more invasive for females.

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