

Hamsters

Hamsters are cute little pets that don't require a lot of care. Watching a hamster stuff food into its cheek pouches is a lot of fun. It is also fun to watch a hamster climb through a series of tubes and run on its exercise wheel.

There are two species of hamsters commonly sold as pets, the better-known Syrian hamster, about 6-8" long, and the dwarf Russian hamster, never larger than 4" long. The Syrian hamster comes in many different colors and coat types, including the longhaired teddy bear hamster.

Hamsters are easy to care for and make good pets for adults and older children.

One hamster, or more?

Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and can only be kept one to a cage. Dwarf Russian hamsters are more social, and can live in groups as long as they are introduced when young, and the cage is large enough. However once they reach sexual maturity the males may begin to fight. Males and females kept together will reproduce very quickly and fathers will have to be removed from the cage. For these reasons we only recommend 1 hamster of any type per cage.

Feeding

The basic hamster diet should be a commercial rodent block or fortified grain mix. You can also give hamsters small amounts of fruit or veggies and other healthy foods. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your hamsters and can comprise 10% of their diet.

Housing

A hamster cage can be made of wire, plastic, or glass. It is probably best to choose a combination of wire and plastic for the best ventilation. Some hamsters have a tendency to chew on plastic, and all hamsters have a tendency to try to escape their cage, so make sure it is secure. For bedding you can choose from aspen shavings or pet litter of recycled paper or organic pellets. Do not use clay litter or cedar shavings. Some hamsters will use a special hamster litter box.

Accessories

Hamsters need a water bottle, a dry food dispenser and a dish for treats. For their bed choose from plastic, wood, or grass houses and/or a hammock or sleeping bag. They need an exercise wheel, and also enjoy tubes, climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

Sanitation

Clean the cage and accessories weekly. Be sure to remove all stored food and scrub all parts of the water bottle.

Health care

With proper care and diet, hamsters tend to be healthy animals. The most common health problem is called "wettail" and appears as foul smelling diarrhea. It is usually related to the stress of moving to a new home or a sudden change in diet. Preventative medication is available and can also be used to treat it should it occur. It is best to pick up a small amount of food the hamster has been used to and mix it with any new food being introduced. Do not offer your hamster fresh veggies or fruit for about a week and then do so gradually and in small amounts.

Special needs

Hamsters need more time than most small pets to socialize to people. It is best to begin handling your hamster in the evening when it is most likely to be awake. Work with him slowly, gently and in short sessions until he is used to you. Hamsters are very nocturnal and do not like to be disturbed during the day. Very cold temperatures can cause a hamster to hibernate, which can cause it to appear dead.

Life cycle

Syrian hamsters live an average of 2-2 1/2 years, although it's possible for them to live 5 years. Hamsters can breed as early as 3 weeks of age but should not until 4 months. The gestation period is 16 days and the average litter size is 6-8. Baby hamsters open their eyes at 18 days and can be weaned at 3-4 weeks.

Dwarf Russian hamsters live an average of 1-1 1/2 years, although it's possible for them to live 3 years. They can breed as early as 4-5 weeks of age but should not until 2-3 months. The gestation period is 18-21 days and the average litter size is 5-6. The babies open their eyes at 12 days and can be weaned at 3 weeks.

Expert Help

If you have questions about your hamster, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a hamster care book for more complete information. You, your veterinarian, and the staff here at the store will form the team which will be responsible for your hamster's well being.

Supplies Checklist

Cage	Treats
Bedding and/or litter	Litter box (optional)
Water bottle	Bed/House
Treat dish	Exercise wheel
Dry food dispenser	Activity toys
Hamster food	Chew toys

This information is brought to you by the Pet Professionals at:

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