

## ----- Feeding

Each hamster will have different tastes. It is important to know what can & cannot be fed to hamsters. Hamsters have cheek pouches which they use to collect food. They push the food into the pouches which expand, then carry the food to a "safe" place to eat. The inner lining of the cheek pouches are very delicate & sharp or sticky foods can become stuck. Most pet shops sell dried food mixes specifically designed for hamsters. These usually consist of crushed oats, barley, rodent pellets, peanuts, sunflower seeds, maize, dog biscuit & some of the better hamster mixes provide a wider variety with the addition of ingredients such as dried fruit & vegetables. This should form the main part of their diet although other foods can be given as treats: Apple, Blueberries, Corn-on-the-Cob, Strawberries, Squash, Peas, Cauliflower & Broccoli (leaves & stalks), Grapes, Green beans, Potato (cooked), Banana, Watermelon, Cucumber, Dandelion leaves & flowers, Watercress, Dog Biscuits. Vegetables & herbs that should not be fed are: Kidney Beans (raw), Onion, Potato (raw), Potato tops, Rhubarb (raw), Rhubarb leaves, Tomato leaves, any type of Bulb.

**Seek veterinary attention if your pet changes behavior or becomes inactive; this may indicate the pet has an illness.**

**As a pet owner, you are responsible for proper pet practices. Be prepared to take an ill pet to a Veterinarian & know which Veterinarian in your area can treat your pet.**



## check-list ✓

### *Your pet Hamster requires...*

- Aquarium or Cage of appropriate size & wire gauge
- Water bottle(best), dish or bowl
- Substrate or bedding material (Aspen shavings)
- Litter Box (optional)
- Cave/Den/Hiding spot
- Toys/tunnels/swings (for climbing & exercise)
- Exercise Wheel (their exercise & your entertainment)
- Food dish for Hamster pellets or block
- Food dish for fresh fruits & veg'



## Hamsters



- breed dependent: weighing between .2kg (dwarfs) & 3kg, length of 5.5cm up to 34 cm (large is near guinea pig size)
- Life Span: 2 - 3 years on average.

## ----- Temperament

The hamster is the most popular of the smaller rodents kept as a pet in many countries today. Hamsters are mammals that belong to a rodent family having large incisor teeth that are continually growing, necessitating gnawing. Hamsters form the Family Cricetidae which has three different Genera. Within each Genera are various species of hamster. There are many different species of hamsters throughout the world & most hamsters inhabit semi-desert areas where they live in burrows. These burrows consist of many tunnels & chambers where the hamster will store food or sleep. They are nocturnal, sleeping during the hot days & waking in the cooler evenings. They have very poor eyesight but a keen sense of smell & excellent hearing. Most species of hamsters have cheek pouches to carry food or bedding. The word 'hamster' comes from the German word 'hamstern' which means 'to hoard'.

Hamsters are great pets, especially as a child's first pet. Their playful antics, curious nature & temperament, teddy bear looks & calm nature make them ideal. They do bite at first, but do take well to humans. There is a huge variety of sizes, coat colors & types for you to choose from. Hamster are solitary creatures & are nocturnal; they are active at night & rest in the day. So they will be ready to play with you for a period, then rest. One thing about hamster is that they are happy without company, so it wouldn't be imperative to buy a pair. They enjoy company (of the same species) but don't need companions like some other rodents. More than one Hamster requires little extra effort or space. They should be of the same sex however. Consider the consequences of breeding. A Syrian hamster can have up to twenty babies in one litter, a dwarf hamster will usually have around eight, but can have more! (the pups are so cute you will be tempted to keep them all) Male hamsters have an elongated bottom with two vents (or openings) & the rounder female hamster's bottom also has two vents but are very close together. Also, the female hamsters vents are not quite as round as the male's. Hamsters can make a very good pet with consistent & gentle handling.

## Housing



Hamsters are friendly, smart, comical, entertaining & a good pet choice.

The ideal cage would be multi-level with many toys to keep them occupied & you entertained. Tunnels, ladders, hammocks, or hanging/moving toys keep Hamsters busy & act as sleep spots. They will need a sleeping den also. There are cages available & easily found that are designed to be inactive, safe & entertaining for Hamsters. The cage size will depend on the type or species of Hamster. They don't need much room. A 5 gallon fish tank is plenty of room for some dwarfs & many people use aquariums rather than wire cages. One of the larger breeds will require around a 20-25 gallon tank. Make sure you have a lid or that the walls are high enough that escape is impossible. They will climb or scale everything in their environment to find an escape route! It is their nature to be curious & go exploring, don't aid it.

Hamsters like to sleep in a place that is dark, warm & dry. Use soft fabric materials for the sleeping area. You could also include a litter box in the cage. The exercise wheel is definitely the most important item. Firstly, they need it, to burn off excess energy & stay healthy. Secondly, because they seem to love these things. Not only will they run, but also climb, ride, swing & sometimes sleep on them like a hammock.

- **Water:** The water bottle is best as a constant water source. Hamsters tend to tread in water bowls or tip them, they often become a labour. Make sure you replace the water in the same spot each time for them to find it. Remember to change the water & clean the water bottle water often!
- **Substrate:** For substrate (bedding) aspen is a good way to go because it doesn't give off any oil. It also allows Hamsters to burrow if the mood strikes them. Green carpet, paper towel, paper mulch, or bark may also be substituted. Cedar & pine are not recommended & avoid sawdust as it causes breathing problems. You may want to provide some rags, fur scraps or soft fabric material for the sleeping den.

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## Health



The hamster may be stricken by colds, colds that otherwise hit humans. For that reason you should be aware about your own hygiene. If you have case of cold, watch how you manage the hamster. If the hamster sneezes & its nose or eyes runs, the cage should be cleaned immediately & the pet kept warm. A typical hamster disease is called "wet tail" exhibiting diarrhoea & apathy. This disease may lead to the death. The preparation "dry tail", which is intended to repeal this condition, is sold in pet shops. The hamster must receive additional liquid to compensate for the loss of liquid caused by the diarrhoea, as well. "Wet tail" could very likely break out because of sudden changes in environment or rough handling. Young hamsters should not be subject to an excess of sudden managing. Hamsters are sensitive to falling & should never be dropped.

## Behavior & Interaction

When bringing a new hamster home, do not expect that it will come into your hands immediately as the hamster will still be afraid or shy. In order to have your hamster to trust you, you should occasionally give it treats. Avoid handling too much until it gains trust in you & will come on his own. This usually takes a couple weeks! Patience is an important factor. Also, to avoid any bites from your hamster, make sure that you wash your hands well after handling any food. When a hamster squeaks, it means that the hamster is afraid or agitated. Hamster hissing is the loudest. This happens in a crouched position, mouth wide open, teeth showing, front paws raised & means the hamster is very upset. Litter box training is possible with Hamsters as they tend to use a designated area for waste naturally.

Bathing should only be done in exceptional circumstances. Bathing removes natural & essential oils from the hamster's coat, which can cause the hamster to catch a chill & die. Hamsters are naturally very clean & will self groom. A hamster wheel is not an optional toy but rather as an absolute necessity. Your hamster's natural habitat would have it evading predators, hunting for food, burrowing underground, so they are very active. That energy needs to be released. Ideally with Hamsters, you want to deck out the cage with things for them to investigate, places to go or items to play with. You will find their antics & acrobatics highly entertaining & sometimes a bit mesmerizing.

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