

# Hamsters

LIFESPAN 2-4 YEARS

## Description

Hamsters are small rodents that belong to the Cricetinae family. This family consists of many sub-species. (Hence the difference between Syrian hamsters, dwarf hamster breeds, etc.) These species include: Syrians, Chinese, Winter White Russian Dwarf, Campbells Russian Dwarf, and the Roborovski Dwarf. The hamster is a small and fragile animal that should be cared and handled with great caution.

## Housing

A popular housing choice for hamsters is a glass aquarium large enough to fit your breed of hamster.

A ten gallon tank would suffice for a single dwarf hamster, while larger tanks such as a twenty or thirty gallon (long) is more suitable for a single Syrian breed. (Syrian hamsters should always be housed alone to prevent fighting.)

The tank should be equipped with a screen lid and can be secured with lid clips. In any case, your choice of housing should be secure and sturdy.

Hamsters do like to climb, and can be escape artists if lids and doors are not secure.

It is best to get dust-free paper bedding for your hamster. Toilet paper and KD aspen are popular bedding choices. Most wood shavings are not always suitable for hamster cages.

Cedar, corn-cob, and straw should be avoided.

Your hamster cage should include: Feed dish, water bottle, solid-surface running wheel, and chews/hideouts.

Be sure to place the enclosure away from direct sunlight and extreme temperatures.



## Diet

Hamsters should be provided with a quality commercial hamster seed mix or lab block diet. (or a mix of both!) Hamsters can have fresh produce as treats, but this should be given sparingly and introduced very slowly to avoid GI upset.

### Safe Produce:

**Vegetables:** Asparagus, Broccoli, Carrots, Celery (small pieces to avoid strings), Corn-on-the-cob, Cucumber, Curly Kale, Green beans, Cooked Potato, Sweet Potato, and Sweet Peppers.

**Fruit (remove pits/seeds):** Apple, Banana, Blackberries, Blueberries, Cranberries, Grapes, Kiwi Fruit, Mango, Melon, Peach, Pear, Raspberries, Strawberries, and Watermelon.

**Avoid:** Kidney Beans, Onion, Potato (raw), Rhubarb (and leaves), and Tomato leaves.

## Grooming

Hamsters are clean by nature and do not require water-baths or wipe-downs unless absolutely necessary.

It is best to avoid water baths to avoid removing essential oils from the coat and causing the animal distress/a decline in health. However, there is special bath sand formulated for small rodents such as hamsters, gerbils, etc that can be placed in a shallow dish for your hamster to roll about.

Hamsters that do not wear their nails down through digging or climbing may have their nails clipped using a small pair of human clippers or cat clippers.

## Exercise

Hamsters should be provided with a solid-surface running wheels to provided in-cage exercise. The wheel should be of

## One or Two?

Pairing and/or grouping hamsters can be risky. It should be done carefully, and usually only attempted with young animals.

Syrians should always be housed alone to prevent fighting.  
Russian Campbells and Robos can live in same-sex pairs or groups.  
Winter White dwarfs usually do better alone or with in same-sex pairs.

Never mix hamster species.

## Health

It is important to find a vet experienced in hamsters, as well as an emergency vet for after-hours care. Hamsters do not require routine veterinary care, but can fall sick or injured just as any other pet.

More common health ailments to watch out for include:

- **Wet Tail**

Wet tail, also known as Proliferative Ileitis, is a condition caused by stress, bacterial infections, or digestive upset that causes wet tail and diarrhea. You should stop feeding produce and assure the hamster is drinking plenty of water to avoid dehydration. Wet tail requires treatment from a veterinarian, especially if the diarrhea does not resolve quickly.

If you notice your hamster with a wet bottom from diarrhea, inactive, poor appetite, or an unkempt coat – it's time to visit your veterinarian.

- **Upper Respiratory Infections (URI)**

Hamsters can catch URI or pneumonia from humans, so avoid handling your hamster if ill. It is important to not expose them to smoking, burning candles, or air fresheners to avoid UR distress.

If you notice your hamster acting lethargic, wheezing, or a runny nose/eye – it's time to visit your veterinarian.

- **Diabetes**

Diabetes occurs when the body does not produce enough insulin, or is unable to use it properly. Dwarfs are prone the condition. Excessive thirst and urination can be signs of the disease, as well as indicators of kidney disease or bladder infections. It is best to see your veterinarian if you notice these symptoms. Diabetes can be linked to obesity, so avoid a high-fat and high-sugar diet. (One containing a high number of seed/nuts or sugary produce. Produce high in sugar include: carrots, berries, and bananas.)

- **Malocclusion**

Malocclusion is a condition in which the teeth become overgrown and unaligned. Malocclusion can be genetic, or caused by trauma to the teeth. A veterinarian is required to trim the teeth and continue maintenance.

If you notice your hamster drooling, having difficulty eating (or not eating at all), and/or unable to shut its mouth - it's time to visit your veterinarian.

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