



HAMSTER CARE

BACKGROUND

Length: Syrian hamsters, 6 inches;
Dwarf hamsters, 2-3 inches

Lifespan: 1 ½ to 2 years

Cost per year: \$300

Good with kids: Because of their nocturnal nature and tendency to nip, not appropriate for families with small children; kids over 6 should be supervised by an adult when handling.

Fun Fact: Watch your hamster stuff his face (literally!) and then empty out his pouch for late-night snacking.

FOOD

- A high-quality rodent lab block should be available to your pet at all times. Supplement this with a high-quality hamster mix, made up of pellets, grains, seeds and dried veggies.
- Fresh, clean water should be available 24/7. A water bottle that attaches to the cage is easiest, but a water bowl can be a good option as well to promote drinking.
- Offer small, bite-sized bits of fresh veggies and fruits every 2-3 days.
 - >> **Recommended:** spinach, lettuce, carrots, apples
 - >> **Avoid:** chocolate, candy, junk food, onions, and uncooked beans and anything that's old or spoiled.
- Your hamster may enjoy small bits of sugarless breakfast cereals and whole wheat bread as a treat.

CAGE & ENVIRONMENT

- Syrian hamsters **MUST** be kept alone. One Syrian hamster per cage — No Exceptions! They will fight and kill each other.
- Keep your Syrian hamster in a solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium with a wire mesh lid (40-gallon breeder minimum). Wire cages are more likely to promote bar chewing and climbing which can be dangerous. Hamsters need at least 600 square inches of floor space to thrive and explore. Try to get the biggest cage you can afford, there are many options. Multiple level enclosures aren't ideal because hamsters are clumsy and will fall.
- Dwarf species can live in pairs, but it is only recommended for experienced owners as falling out between a pair is common. Do not house male and female dwarf hamsters together, as hamsters breed quickly — and often — with large litters.
- Dwarf hamsters need the same amount of cage space as Syrian hamsters! 600 square inches minimum.
- Set up the cage indoors, away from drafts and direct sunlight, and away from other pets such as dogs and cats.
- Line cage with at least 6 inches of bedding (see Supply Checklist for recommendations). Don't use cedar or pine chips, as the fumes can be harmful.
 - Provide multiple hides so your hamster can choose to hide.
 - Hamsters love sand baths! This is different than dust baths- too fine of dust irritates their respiratory systems. Reptile sand works great, and they can use it as a bath and litter box.

BEHAVIOR & HANDLING

- Hamsters are crepuscular by nature, so it's normal for them to play and eat at night. They tend to nip if awakened during the day, so take care not to bother your pet while he's sleeping.
- Once your hamster is hand-tamed, allow him outside of the cage for a supervised period of time every day. Keep him in one room or screened off area that's been secured so he can't escape or get lost. Playpens are a great choice for free roam time. Hamsters don't have good eyesight, so take care that he doesn't fall or otherwise hurt himself. And remove all electrical cords from the area, please!

EXERCISE & TOYS

- Hamsters are big on exercise, so make sure yours has a wheel that spins easily and is at least 12 inches in diameter with a solid surface. Your pet will love burrowing in deep bedding and hiding in houses as well.
- **NEVER** use an exercise ball for any animal- they are dangerous and don't allow any ability to explore.
- Plastic tubes are too small to use for Syrian hamsters-they can get stuck in them!
- Give your hamster appropriate chew toys to help wear down his teeth, which grow continuously.
 - >> **Recommended:** unpainted, untreated wood or twigs, Whimzees

DAILY CARE

- Remove soiled bedding, droppings and stale/uneaten food daily. Clean and refill the water bottle or bowl every day.
- There isn't a need to fully clean out the hamster's cage completely more than once a month if you have enough bedding. Doing full clean outs can be wasteful as well as stressful to the hamster.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Bring your Hamster to the veterinarian annually for check-ups. Don't wait for your yearly appointment if you think one of your pets is sick—seek help immediately. Common signs that something isn't right include dull-looking eyes, overgrown teeth, matted fur, weight loss, shaking, runny nose and diarrhea.
- Hamsters are susceptible to respiratory problems, including bacterial pneumonia, which they can catch from humans.





HAMSTER SUPPLY CHECKLIST

- Solid-bottom wire cage or aquarium (600 square inch minimum) with mesh top for ventilation
- Rodent lab blocks and *high-quality* hamster seed mix
- Bedding such as Carefresh and aspen, along with sand bath
- Small boxes, huts, or flower pots for hiding in
- Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls)
- Solid bottom 12-inch wheel for Syrians, 8+ inches for dwarf hamsters
- Attachable water bottle or water bowl
- Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or twig, Whimzees, or safe chew toy

