

Gerbil

Meriones unguiculatus



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Gerbils are social animals with bold and curious personalities that enjoy observing the activity of a busy household. Gerbils love to burrow and play in tubes and boxes.



Is a gerbil the right companion animal for you?

Yes	No
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Check "Yes" or "No" after reading the following statements:

- I have an appropriate location and space for a gerbil.
- I know that male and female gerbils should not be housed together.
- I will provide daily, supervised time for this gerbil outside the habitat.
- I can commit to providing proper care for this gerbil.
- A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.

If you answered, "Yes" to these statements, a gerbil may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a gerbil and consult with a PETCO associate to learn more. PETCO is committed to responsible companion animal care.

Average Size 4 to 5 inches long

Life Span Up to 5 years with proper care

Diet High-quality gerbil food

Small amounts of fruits and vegetables; too much may cause diarrhea

Treats should not exceed 10% of total food intake

Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water changed daily

Do not feed chocolate, alcohol or caffeine as these can cause serious medical problems

Feeding Food and water should always be available

Small amounts of fresh fruits or vegetables can be given daily

Fruits and vegetables not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded

Housing Gerbils acclimate well to average household temperatures; be cautious of extreme temperature changes; habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area

Habitat should be glass, plastic or metal, escape-proof with solid bottom; a 15-gallon aquarium with a screen lid makes a good home for two gerbils; it is best to provide the largest habitat possible

1–2 inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes hardwood shavings and pellets or recycled products; cedar bedding may cause harm and is not recommended

Different types of small animals should not be housed together

Recommended Supplies

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriately sized cage | <input type="checkbox"/> Ceramic food bowl | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiding place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bedding | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise toys |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High-quality gerbil food | <input type="checkbox"/> Vitamins | <input type="checkbox"/> Chew stick |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about gerbils | <input type="checkbox"/> Treats | <input type="checkbox"/> Salt lick |

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Normal Behavior and Interaction

Enjoy an occasional sand or dust bath
Thump their back feet to signal fear
Chews on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously; ensure have plenty of chew sticks available

Habitat Maintenance

Remove wet spots daily; change bedding weekly or more often, as needed
Clean the habitat and its contents once a week with mild soap and water, rinse and allow to dry completely before placing gerbil back into the habitat

Grooming and Hygiene

Gerbils stay clean and do not need baths; clean with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes, if necessary; fur may be brushed with a soft-backed brush
Consult with a veterinarian if a gerbil's teeth or nails seem too long
Because all gerbils are potential carriers of infectious diseases, always wash your hands before and after handling your gerbil and/or the habitat contents to help prevent the potential of spread of diseases.
Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing and/or caring for a gerbil and should consider not having a gerbil as a pet. For more information regarding gerbils and disease, contact the Center for Disease Control at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/> and PETCO at <http://www.petco.com/pet care info/companion animal care sheets>.

Signs of a Healthy Animal

- Active, alert, and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is clear and walks normally

Common Health Issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stools caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing, or other illness.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian to possibly have teeth trimmed regularly.
Mites	External parasite that causes gerbils to lose patches of hair.	Contact an exotic animal veterinarian for treatment.
Tumors	Abnormal lumps.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian.

Red Flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Overgrown teeth

If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian.

Sources

Choosing a Small Mammal by Dennis Kelsey-Wood
The ASPCA Complete Guide to Pet Care by David L. Carroll
The Gerbil by Betsy Sikora Siing

Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, please refer to the above sources or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.