

Hamster

Mesocricetus auratus



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Short-haired, long-haired and European hamsters are clean and captivating companion animals that are best kept individually. Hamsters are known as hoarders because they have cheek pouches that they use to store and move food from one place to another.



Is a hamster 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 hamster.
- I know that male and female hamsters should not be housed together.
- I will provide daily interaction with my hamster.
- I can commit to providing proper care for this hamster.
- A mature person will provide responsible and primary care for this companion animal.

If you answered, "Yes" to these statements, a hamster may be the right choice for you! Continue reading about how to care for a hamster 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 2 - 3 years with proper care

Diet High-quality hamster food
 Small amounts of grains, vegetables, fruits, and timothy hay
 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 Fresh food and water should always be available
 Small amounts of grains, vegetables, fruits, or timothy hay can be given daily
 Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded

Housing Hamsters acclimate well to average household temperatures; be cautious of extreme temperature change; habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area
 Habitat should be glass, plastic or metal, escape-proof with solid bottom; there should be plenty of room for the hamster to exercise and play; 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 or pelleted or recycled products; cedar bedding may cause harm and is not recommended
 House adult hamsters separately

- Recommended Supplies**
- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriate sized cage | <input type="checkbox"/> Food bowl | <input type="checkbox"/> Chew stick |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bedding | <input type="checkbox"/> Water bottle | <input type="checkbox"/> Nesting house |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High-quality hamster food | <input type="checkbox"/> Vitamins | <input type="checkbox"/> Hiding place |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Book about hamsters | <input type="checkbox"/> Bed Fluff | <input type="checkbox"/> Exercise toys |

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Normal Behavior and Interaction

Active during the night and sleep during the day (nocturnal)
Easy to handle but may nip if suddenly awakened from a nap or startled
Chew on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously; ensure have plenty of chew sticks available
Solitary; never house more than one adult hamster per habitat

Habitat Maintenance

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

Grooming and Hygiene

Hamsters stay clean and do not need baths; can be spot cleaned with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes, if needed
Consult with a veterinarian if a hamster's teeth or nails seem too long
Because all hamsters are potential carriers of infectious diseases, always wash your hands before and after handling your hamster 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 hamster and should consider not having a hamster as a pet. For more information regarding hamsters 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 responsive
 - Eats and drinks regularly
 - Healthy, clean fur and clear eyes
 - Breathes clearly and walks normally
- It is normal for a hamster's teeth to be yellow; cleaning is not necessary

Common Health Issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diabetes	Frequent urination and lethargy.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian.
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 hamsters to lose patches of hair.	Consult with an exotic animal veterinarian for treatment.

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
Hamsters as a New Pet by Anmarie Barrie
The ASPCA Complete Guide to Pet Care by David L. Carroll

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.