



Hamsters



Hamsters are very calm if handled frequently and gently. They have very little odour. They sleep during the day, and are often active at night (nocturnal). They may bite if startled, and can escape and disappear easily.

A variety of colours and lengths of hair coats. They tend to be less active than mice, rats and gerbils. They are nocturnal which means they sleep during the day and are awake at night. Of the rodents kept as pets, the hamster is most likely to bite, especially females.

Selection

The best hamster is a healthy young animal that you can train yourself. Older animals that may have been mistreated are ill-tempered and are hard to handle.

Select an animal between 5 and 8 weeks old. Signs of good health are soft, silken fur; prominent, bright eyes; and a plump body. If possible, buy a hamster that is already in a cage by itself.

Do not select long or skinny hamsters. Do not select animals with patches of fur missing, runny noses, watery eyes or a wet tail.

Determining the age of the hamster is fairly easy. The insides of the ears of a young hamster are covered with tiny white hairs. As the animal becomes older, these hairs gradually disappear until the ears are hairless and shiny.

Males seem to make nicer pets because of their temperament. As they grow older, they remain tame and in a good mood. Females grow less friendly and may become snappy.

Regardless of the hamster you select, have his new home ready for him before you buy.

Facilities/Housing

An excellent hamster cage is one made of metal with a removable bottom for easy cleaning and an upstairs platform with exercise wheel. A wooden cage can be used if it has hardware cloth on the inside to prevent the hamster from gnawing through.

Bedding may be shredded paper, cedar shavings, sawdust, ground corn cobs, peanut hulls, or any other absorbent materials.

The hamster appreciates a handful of shredded paper or absorbent cotton to build his nest. In cold weather he'll weave the material into a tiny igloo, while in summer the nest will resemble a bird's.

Because the hamster selects one corner of his cage as a permanent bathroom, that corner needs to be cleaned and fresh bedding put in every day. Once a week, wash the entire cage with soap and water and disinfect with a standard aerosol disinfectant to keep down odors and chances of disease. Wait until the cage is completely dry, then replace bedding, and your hamster is good for another week.

Be sure, whichever type cage you choose, that you keep it on a shelf or table, out of drafts, and never in direct sunlight.

Equipment



Cages should be equipped with an automatic water bottle. The bottle has a small nipple on a water tube that allows water to trickle out when the animal puts its mouth against the nipple. They should also have an automatic feeder for seeds or other food. As the animal eats, the feeder automatically refills.

Fresh water is essential at all times. Water can be provided through a glass gravity flow bottle with a rubber cork. Insert a glass or copper tube through the rubber cork so that when the bottle is attached upside down, water flows slowly into the

tube as your animal drinks.

Remember also to provide your hamster with a piece of hardwood to grind down his continually growing incisor teeth .

An exercise wheel of some type is a must. The hamster will spend several happy hours playing on it.

Feeding

The simplest food for your hamster is a commercial hamster food that you can buy at most pet stores. An adult hamster requires only a half ounce of food each day. You can feed him small amounts of lettuce, carrots, celery, and other vegetables and fruits, but **do not give him any citrus fruits.**

The natural food of the hamster is grains, seeds, and vegetables. Corn, oats, or wheat mixed with prepared dog food can also be used. They may also enjoy a bit of hay to munch on.

Provide a food dish for your hamster. He will load his cheek pouches and store everything tidily away in a corner of the cage. Let your hamster hoard a certain amount of feed, but continuously remove any uneaten greens since they soon spoil.

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Treats: Hamsters have a sweet tooth so be careful not to spoil it on only sweet food.

Management

Hamsters can be rather quarrelsome, so only one should be put into a cage except for mating. Handling your hamster each day keeps him tame and friendly.

To handle your hamster, scoop him up gently in the palm of your hand. Then, let him walk from hand to hand while you rub and talk to him. Once you have gained his trust, he'll hang from your hand by a single finger, climb toy ladders, and provide a lot of playful excitement.

There are a few things that you should never do:

- Never pick up your hamster until he is fully awake. The hamster is a deep sleeper plus being short sighted. If alarmed, he may bite your finger.
- Never leave your hamster alone on a high place. He cannot judge distance and may walk off on air with bad results.
- Never tease or frighten your hamster. This could cause loss of gentleness.

Grooming:

Grooming is not necessary for most small rodents. They spend a great deal of time grooming themselves. The nails of a rodent may be lightly filed with an emery board if they become long and sharp, but this is unusual.

Handling

Hamsters have lots of loose skin. They can be picked up holding all of the loose skin at the back of the neck. Most small rodents like to ride around on your shoulder or arm once they have been picked up. Move slowly and smoothly and be careful not to jar the animal so that it loses its footing. Falling from your shoulder would be much like you falling from a ten-storey building. Guinea pigs, rats and hamsters are easily hurt by falls. So BE CAREFUL!

Exercise:

Activities such as playing on a wheel or climbing on objects will provide exercise for a pet rodent.

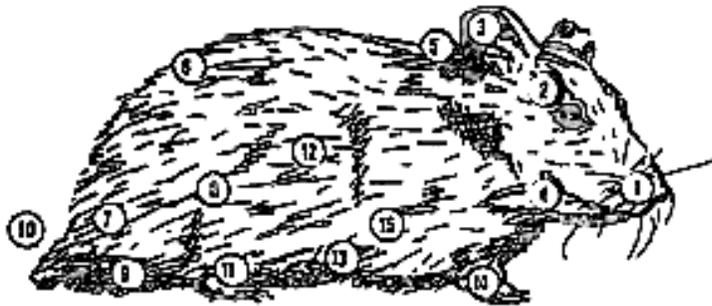
Rodents usually aren't trained to do tricks. However, their natural behaviour can be fun to watch. Supply a rodent with objects such as a tread wheel, branches to climb, and an old paper tube from a roll of paper towels. Your pet can be quite entertaining as it plays on these.

General Maintenance:

Cages should be kept bedded down with a 2.5 centimetres layer of cedar wood shavings. Gerbils like 15-20 centimetres of paper litter so they can burrow into it. These should be cleaned out completely at least once a week. Twice a week is even better. The cage may be scrubbed with a mild detergent and water, dried, and filled with fresh bedding again.

Health Care

Parts of a Hamster



- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Nostril | 9. Scrotum |
| 2. Eye | 10. Tail |
| 3. Ear | 11. Hind Foot |
| 4. Cheek Pouch | 12. Rib cage |
| 5. Nape of Neck | 13. Belly |
| 6. Back | 14. Fore Paws |
| 7. Rump | 15. Shoulder |
| 8. Thigh | |

Hamsters should have sleek, shiny coats. A dull, rough coat may mean an illness. Skin problems may be caused by mites or infections. Hamster urine is light yellow and thick, something like pus. The corner where the hamster urinates needs to be cleaned daily, and the entire cage washed with soap and water once a week.

A healthy hamster, in the evening, will run around his cage, play on his wheel, look for food, clean his fur, climb on his cage wall, and carry his short tail erect.

Rodents are not usually vaccinated. Their good health depends on keeping them in a warm, dry place with a clean cage. Avoid sudden changes in foods and temperatures.

The teeth of rodents grow continually. Check all the teeth regularly to make sure they aren't overgrown. *Check your hamster's teeth:* Use a piece of hardwood, rabbit pellets, or dog biscuits to keep teeth worn down. If teeth are too long, the hamster cannot eat properly and will become sick.

A small rodent will often arch its back, keep its head low and stay in one spot when it is sick. Hamsters will become more aggressive.

Rodents are fussy about their grooming habits. Soiling around eyes, nose, rectum or abdomen often means a health problem. Patchy hair loss and lots of scratching may mean mites.

Common Cold: Symptoms are a runny nose, lack of activity, and sniffles. Cures are:

- Clean the cage..
- Put in dry bedding.
- Keep the cage in warm spot.
- Cover cage with newspaper to insure against draft.
- Give hamster could drops of cod-liver oil on a piece of bread.
- Clean cage after recovery.

Parasites such as lice and fleas can be controlled by using an insecticide for cats. **Never** use an insecticide for dogs.

Hamster droppings: Loose droppings result from too many fresh vegetables and fruits. Hard droppings are a sign of not enough fresh vegetables and fruits.

Cage paralysis is caused by improper feeding, lack of Vitamin D and lack of exercise. Symptoms are inactivity, inability to raise its head, and crawling along, pushing nose on the floor of the cage.

Breeding

General facts about breeding hamsters that you should remember are:

- The gestation period of a hamster is 16 days.
- The mother has 3 to 12 babies.
- After one week, the mother can breed again.
- Two months after baby hamsters are born, they become sexually mature.
- One pair of hamsters can produce 36 to 144 hamsters in one year.

These facts tell us to be extra careful in mating of hamsters. Before mating, be sure you have located a home for all the baby hamsters.

Economics

Hamsters multiply quickly. If you find a pet store that will purchase your supply of baby hamsters, it can provide a small income.

Project Resources



Pinterest - The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards - Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for hamster information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "hamster" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example, try hamster diet or training a hamster.

The following links may be of interest:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamster>

<http://cfhs.ca/athome/hamsters/>

http://www.cs.mcgill.ca/~rwest/link-suggestion/wpdc_2008-09_augmented/wp/h/Hamster.htm

Sections of the Snake Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



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