

Brant County SPCA

HAMSTERS HAMSTERS



GENERAL CARE INFORMATION

General Information

Hamsters are mammals that belong to the rodent family, having large incisor teeth that are continually growing, therefore having to gnaw to prevent the teeth from overgrowing. They have expandable cheek pouches in which they can carry food and bedding back to their burrows. The average life expectancy of a hamster is anywhere from 2-3 years and slightly longer.

The commitment of owning a hamster includes routine feeding, care and time spent with the hamster but also the provision of veterinary treatment if the hamster becomes ill which can be costly. It is best to buy the essential items of equipment such as cage, floor covering, nesting material, water bottle, and food before getting a hamster, so that these are ready for the hamster's arrival.

Housing

Purchasing a cage is the greatest expense in keeping a hamster. It is important to provide the largest cage possible for the hamster as this is where it will spend the majority of its time and too small of a cage can lead to behavioral problems.

The most common type of hamster cage has a plastic base and a rigid wire top. The wire top can be unclipped from the base making it easy to remove the hamster from the cage or to clean the cage. Similar cages with two or more levels are also available with ladders, which allow the hamster to climb up and down between the different levels. There are also various makes of cages, which consist of solid compartments and tunnels. These cages are often quite expensive and can be difficult to take apart and clean. These cages are generally not suitable for larger or pregnant hamsters as they may get stuck in the tunnels. As a minimum, any cage must have at least one large compartment, which allows the hamster plenty of room in which to explore and exercise, as well as a compartment for nesting.

Aquariums can also be used to house hamsters as these are draught proof and relatively cheap, but glass aquariums can be awkward to clean because of their heavy weight. Plastic aquariums however are much easier to clean as they are lighter but the sides tend to become scratched after time.

Floor Covering & Bedding

A covering is required for the floor of the cage to provide a soft, comfortable surface for the hamster and to soak up the urine. The most common type of floor covering available is wood shavings – fine sawdust must be avoided as this can cause irritation to the eyes and respiratory problems. Cedar wood shavings (usually distinguished by a red tint) should not be used as the phenols they contain can cause severe irritations in hamsters. Although Pine is also softwood, Pine wood shavings cause fewer problems than Cedar and kiln dried Pine can be used without problems. Any form of scented shavings must be avoided as these can also cause irritation. Corncob bedding is not generally recommended as it has a tendency to mould and hamsters have been known to eat it and it can swell when wet inside the stomach. Wood shavings from hardwood such as Aspen or small animal litter made from wood pulp (such as Carefresh) are the safest forms of floor covering to use.

A hamster will appreciate some bedding material with which to build a “nest”. Bedding material can be bought in pet shops but any fluffy cotton wool type bedding should be avoided as this can cause harm if eaten and fine fibers can become caught around a limb causing injury. Undyed and unscented toilet paper or paper towel can be used as a cheaper method of supplying bedding.

When purchasing a house, wood blocks, tubes or other toys make sure that the holes are sufficient in size to allow your hamster to easily maneuver in and out of the item. A sand bath can be provided by placing a suitable sized dish in the cage filled with either fine sand or chinchilla dust.

Cage Cleaning

The cage should be cleaned weekly by removing the hamster from the cage and throwing away all old floor covering, bedding and food. Some of the old bedding can be kept and mixed with new bedding. All fresh food that has been stored by the hamster should be removed every couple of days to avoid rotting.

Feeding

Hamster mixes usually consist of crushed oats, barley, rodent pellets, peanuts, sunflower seeds, maize, dog biscuit and some of the better mixes provide a wider variety with the addition of ingredients such as dried fruit and vegetables. Hamster pellets are compressed food pellets, which do not always meet the hamster’s nutritional requirements; therefore, some hamster mix should be added to the diet. Food mixes designed for other animals should not be given, as these may not be suitable to meet your hamster’s dietary requirements. Change in diet should be done gradually as sudden changes can cause your hamster to become ill.

Although hamster mix will provide the hamster with a good basic diet, hamsters also enjoy fruit and vegetables. However, these should be introduced slowly. To begin, the hamster should only receive a small piece of fruit or vegetable once or twice a week and over a period of weeks; this can be increased to a small piece every day. If at any time the hamster has diarrhea, all feeding of fruit and vegetables should cease.

Vegetables, fruits and herbs that are SAFE to feed hamsters:

• Alfalfa	• Coriander	• Parsley
• Apple (seedless)	• Corn-on-the-Cob	• Peach
• Asparagus	• Dates	• Pear
• Avocado (skinned and seedless)	• Endive	• Peas
• Banana	• Figs	• Plums (pits removed)
• Basil	• Grapes	• Potato (cooked)
• Blackberries	• Green Beans	• Raspberries
• Blueberries	• Kale (small amounts)	• Raspberry plant leaves
• Broccoli	• Kidney beans (cooked)	• Rhubarb (cooked)
• Brussel Sprouts (small amounts)	• Kiwi	• Rocket Chard
• Calabrese	• Kumquat	• Sage
• Cabbage (small amounts)	• Lettuce (small amounts)	• Squash
• Carrots	• Logan Berries	• Star Fruit
• Cauliflower (leaves & stalks)	• Mango	• Strawberries
• Celery	• Marrow	• Sugar Cane (small amounts)
• Cherries (pits removed)	• Melon	• Sweet Potato
• Chestnuts	• Mint	• Soybean Sprouts
• Chicory	• Okra	• Sweet Peppers
• Chinese Leaves	• Pak Choy	• Turnip
• Watermelon	• Papaya	• Water Chestnuts

Vegetables that should NOT be fed to hamsters:

• Raw Kidney Beans	• Raw Rhubarb	• Rhubarb Leaves
• Onions	• Tomato Leaves	• Potato (raw)
• Potato Tops		

NEVER FEED YOUR HAMSTER ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

• Buttercups	• Chocolate	• Garlic	• Onions
• Rabbit Mix (with antibiotics)	• Raw Kidney Beans	• Sweets	• Toffee