



## Gerbils

*Meriones unguiculatus* (Mongolian) and *M. libycus* (Libyan).

**Amanda Zellar, DVM**

Gerbils are usually friendly, and rarely bite. They are active during the day, can sometimes be heard vocalizing, foot-drum when excited, and are excellent burrowers and jumpers. Gerbils often do not get along well with other gerbils. They can have of benign seizures if they are very stressed. They can start breeding at 2 months old, with babies born in 3.5-7 weeks. Mother and father gerbils tend to be good parents and will raise young together. Litters have 3-7 babies and wean at 3 weeks old. Gerbils live 3-5 years, with females often living longer than males. Adult males weigh 65-100g, and adult females weigh 55-85g. Their tail can come off if pulled! It is illegal to keep gerbils in California.

**Health care:** Gerbils can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by more than 10%, as this may indicate they have a health condition that should be addressed. Dental problems, particularly over grown teeth, are common. The sooner we see any disease, the easier it is to treat!

**Housing:** Wire cages allow better air circulation, but careful that your pet isn't chewing through or squeezing between bars. Watch out for escape artists! Be sure the cage base is solid or padded with enough bedding to prevent animals from standing on bare wire. Gerbils often do not usually get along well with other gerbils and should be housed separately. Aquariums and plastic cages need to be cleaned more frequently than wire cages. Wire cages should be cleaned every four days. The cage should be lined with several inches of pelleted paper or shredded newspaper for burrowing. Wood shavings, can make any underlying respiratory conditions worse, because they tend to be dusty. Avoid cedar, walnut and pine shavings, as their strong smell and some oils contained in the wood can be irritating. Cardboard is a good toy for chewing and enrichment. Wood and harder materials can damage the teeth if chewed too vigorously. Be careful not to put cloth, or anything that can get wrapped around legs, into the cage. A hidebox is important to relieve stress. The temperature should be kept at 65-75F. A water bottle (with no added vitamins!) should be provided fresh daily. Rodents can see blue, green and yellow, but not red. As a result, red transparent play tubes or hutches can allow you to get a good look at your pet while helping them feel a little safer.

**Diet:** Free choice commercial rodent pellets (protein of 16-22%), supplemented with fresh veggies, particularly leafy greens are best. Avoid: seed diets, sugary foods/treats, and cheese. Just because they like it does not mean it is healthy for them! Almonds in the shell make good occasional treats and chew toys.

