



Hamsters

Mesocricetus auratus

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Some common pet hamster breeds are the Syrian: standard, short-haired; teddy bear: long haired; and dwarf hamsters. They are nocturnal animals, meaning they are most active at night. They can also be escape artists. Hamsters usually don't get along very well with other hamsters. Mother hamsters are often not very good parents. Females can start breeding at 5 weeks old but it is better for them to wait until at least 6 weeks; males start breeding at 10 weeks old, and babies are born in 2-3 weeks. Litters have 5-9 babies that are weaned at about 3 weeks old. Hamsters live 2-3 years. An adult male should weigh 85-130g, and a female should weigh 95-150g (less for dwarf hamsters).

Housing: Wire cages allow better air circulation, but be 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. Hamsters do not usually get along well with other hamsters and should be housed separately. Aquariums and plastic cages need to be cleaned more frequently than wire cages, which should be cleaned every four days. Solid sided cages, which are not cleaned frequently enough, can build up high levels of ammonia, which is irritating to the respiratory tract, eyes and skin. 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 chew toy for enrichment. Wood and other hard 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 and provide a place for the nocturnal creatures to spend the day. 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. Grass hay can also be offered free choice. 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.

More on the back!

Health care: Hamsters 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!

