



## Hedgehogs

*Atelerix albiventris.*

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Most pet hedgehogs are African pygmy hedgehogs: *Atelerix albiventris*. Hedgehogs are nocturnal, meaning they are most active at night. Adults weigh between 250 and 600 grams. They typically live 3-8 years but can live up to 12 years. Hedgehogs exhibit a behavior called anting when they encounter new things in their environment: they taste the object then foam at the mouth and spread the foam on their spines. It is unclear what purpose this behavior serves.

**Husbandry concerns:** Hedgehogs are best housed singly. Smooth sided enclosures are best. Avoid wire as hedgehogs can easily damage their feet. A 20 gallon aquarium is the minimum amount of space for a hedgehog. Larger enclosures are better. Allowing hedgehogs to roam freely around the house unsupervised is not recommended as they are very good climbers, but do not hesitate to nose-dive off high places. A hidebox to sleep in during the day is very important to prevent hedgehogs from becoming stressed. Recycled paper beddings work well. Bedding should be 3-4 inches deep as hedgehogs love to burrow. Burying PVC pipe in bedding can be good enrichment and a good hide spot. Avoid cedar and pine shavings as strong smells and oils in the wood can be very irritating to hedgehogs. Bedding should be changed twice a week. Large, smooth, clean rocks should be provided for hedgehogs to rub their faces. Hedgehogs should be kept between 75-85F. If they get too cold, they can enter a hibernation like state called torpor. Only exercise wheels made specially for hedgehogs should be used as hedgehogs tend to get their legs caught in rodent wheels and they can easily break. Hedgehogs often like foraging for insects in gardens, but make sure they are supervised in well fenced pens and there are no pesticides present. They are excellent diggers. Hedgehogs may need nail trims periodically. This can be done by your veterinarian if they are uncooperative at home. Hedgehogs are typically good swimmers and like water. Shallow pans make good swimming pools for them. Every 2-3 weeks, they should get a bath using puppy, kitten or ferret shampoo. Use a toothbrush to gently scrub their back. If your hedgehog is scratching a lot or losing many spines, this may indicate they have mites, which should be treated by your veterinarian.

**Diet:** Feed in the evening. Try for an amount of food that is completely or almost gone by morning as obesity from over eating is a common problem. 2-3 tablespoons of commercial insectivore diet or high quality hard kibble senior cat food and 1-2 tablespoons of mixed fresh vegetables daily and 3-5 insects, 3-4 times per week: mealworms, earthworms, crickets or wild caught insects. Be sure any wild insects are pesticide free and do not feed fireflies as they are poisonous! Hedgehogs should always have clean fresh water. Most hedgehogs will drink from a water bottle, but it is important to provide a water bowl until you are sure they are using the water bottle.

**More on the back!**

**Health Care:** Hedgehogs 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 10%, or more. Neutering and spaying helps prevent reproductive tumors and unexpected pregnancies, and can help with some behavior problems. Common health problems in hedgehogs include: obesity and related liver disease, cancer, dental problems, mites, GI problems. Remember, the sooner we see a problem, the easier it is to treat!

**Reproduction:** Males reach sexual maturity at 7-9 weeks and females at 8-12 weeks. Gestation is 34-37 days for litters of 3-4 that wean at 4-6 weeks. Do not disturb mother hedgehogs as they may harm their babies if they are stressed.

