

CARING FOR YOUR GERBIL

FOOD & WATER

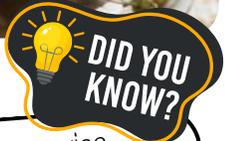
FOOD

Chow down

Being omnivores, gerbils eat both plant and animal foods. Feed yours a staple diet of pelleted food made for gerbils. Pellets are a complete, balanced diet and should be available to them all the time.



Provide a small amount of vegetables, greens, fruits and seeds every day, too. Gerbils crave variety! Be sure to remove any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make them sick.



Gerbils have continuously growing front teeth. Because of this, they must gnaw on abrasive foods and materials to help them wear their teeth down. It's really important to follow a proper diet and give them things to chew!

Snack time

Gerbils love treats! Foods such as unsweetened whole grain cereals, nuts and mealworms make great snacks. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with overweight gerbils.

WHAT ABOUT MIXES?

Some diets sold for gerbils contain a mix of foods like seeds, dried fruits and corn. The problem with these diets is that gerbils can pick and choose what they like, which means they won't get all the nutrients they need, even if the diet is advertised as "complete."



WATER

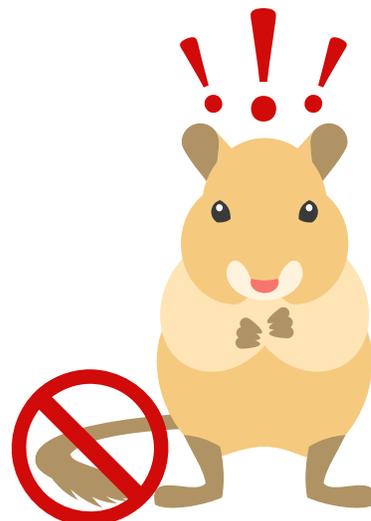
Gerbils need water available to them all the time. Fill your gerbils' sipper bottle with clean, fresh water every day. Once a week, clean the bottle using soap and water and rinse well before refilling.

Avoid water dishes. Gerbils tend to bury them as they dig, creating a soggy mess.

HANDLING

Handle with care

You can pick up your gerbils by putting cupped hands near them and letting them crawl into your hands. Be careful not to squeeze. Not all gerbils enjoy being held and they may try to leap from your hands.



Hands off tails!

Gerbils should never be picked up by their tail because part of it could be torn off. It won't grow back.

CARING FOR YOUR GERBIL HOME ENVIRONMENT



Gerbils are active animals requiring a large habitat. The more space, the better!

Your gerbils' living space should include:

- Areas for your gerbils to hide
- Opportunities to dig, chew and explore

HABITAT OPTIONS

Gerbils are burrowers so a deep enclosure with a solid bottom is best. A 40 gallon aquarium with a wire mesh lid works well for a pair of gerbils. Aquariums are secure and can easily be filled with burrowing material.

For bedding, use wood shavings such as aspen, shredded paper or recycled paper bedding (or a mix of all three!). Don't use cedar or pine shavings because they can cause health problems.

Provide a deep layer of bedding to allow your gerbils to burrow. Clean the entire cage every two weeks. Gerbils aren't known for being smelly. As desert animals, they produce dry feces and very little urine.

Adding small houses, hanging toys, ramps, tunnels, tubes and a solid (not wire) exercise wheel provides stimulation and places to hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your gerbils' home interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material like toilet paper for your gerbils to gather.

WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO PUT YOUR GERBILS' HOME?

Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as bright lights and loud noises.



Other habitat options include a long glass IKEA® cabinet turned on its side (though you'll need to make your own secure, well-ventilated lid for this).



Aquariums can be quite expensive. The good news is you don't need a brand new one to create a comfortable, stimulating home for your gerbils. A used aquarium will do – and costs a lot less. It doesn't need to hold water so leaks don't matter! You can look through online ads or check out garage sales for used tanks.

CARING FOR YOUR GERBIL

EXERCISE & PLAY

TOYS & GAMES

Gerbils require daily exercise and will happily explore a playpen made just for them. A wading pool or a bathtub (drain closed!) lined with a towel works well. Fill with safe objects to climb on, over and through to keep your gerbils busy and interested. Paper bags, cereal boxes, paper cups, toilet paper rolls and untreated wood are good choices. Always supervise playtime.



Which wheel?

When choosing a wheel, solid surfaces (like all-plastic wheels) are safer and more comfortable than wire ones, which can hurt gerbil feet. As for size, when gerbils run, their back shouldn't be arched into a U-shape – that means the wheel is too small. Running like that can hurt their back.

Keep the cardboard coming!

Gerbils love to chew, and cardboard is a particular favourite. Drink holders, egg cartons, toilet paper rolls and tissue boxes all make great gerbil toys. Plus, they're easy to find and free. Give your gerbils cardboard on a daily basis.



BUDDY UP!

Gerbils shouldn't be kept alone. Two or more can live together provided they're the same sex and have a large enough living space. To help prevent squabbles, gerbils kept in pairs should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they're very young.



FIRST ADOPTION OPTION

Interested in adding gerbils to your family? [Make adoption your first option!](#) BC SPCA Community Animal Centres often have gerbils available for adoption.

Benefits of adoption from the BC SPCA:

- In-Centre physical exam performed by staff
- Medical treatment by a veterinarian, if required, while in care



BCSPCA

CARING FOR YOUR GERBIL HEALTH

A HEALTHY GERBIL

- ✓ Eyes are clean and bright
- ✓ Ears are clean with no discharge or unpleasant odour
- ✓ Coat is smooth and shiny
- ✓ Nose is clean with no discharge or redness
- ✓ Not too fat or too thin



MEDICAL CARE



Gerbils are a prey species. This means they tend to hide their symptoms when they're not feeling well. Watch out for changes to your gerbils' eating habits and other changes in their behaviour and routines. If you notice something different, contact a veterinarian. Gerbils usually live for three to four years.

DENTAL CARE



To help wear down their ever-growing front teeth, provide your gerbils with chewing items such as cardboard, Timothy hay, wooden toys, and willow and apple sticks. Make sure the branches come from trees that haven't been treated with any chemicals.



GROOMING

Gerbils are great groomers. They spend lots of time each day carefully cleaning themselves and each other all over. Should you notice your gerbils' coats looking a little greasy, provide them with a dust bath – a small fish bowl or glass jar tilted on its side with a shallow layer (two to three tablespoons) of animal-safe sand like chinchilla sand. Leave the bath in their cage for about half an hour before taking it out.



TOO MANY GERBILS!

Gerbils in shelters and rescues across B.C. are in need of new homes. *Try to make adoption your first option if you love gerbils!*

PREVENT UNWANTED LITTERS

Never keep male and female gerbils together, even for a short period. Gerbils multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 12 litters in just one year, with anywhere from one to eight young per litter. Baby gerbils need to be separated by sex at eight weeks of age before they begin breeding.

