

CARING FOR YOUR HAMSTER

FOOD & WATER

FOOD

Chow down

Being omnivores, hamsters eat both plant and animal foods. Feed yours a staple diet of pelleted food made for hamsters. 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. Hamsters crave variety! Be sure to remove any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make them sick. Hamsters hoard their food, so be sure to look for hidden stashes too.



Snack time

Hamsters love treats! Foods such as scrambled egg, mealworms and nuts make great snacks. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with an overweight hamster.

WHAT ABOUT MIXES?

Some diets sold for hamsters contain a mix of foods like seeds, dried fruits and corn. The problem with these diets is that hamsters 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."



Hamsters 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!



WATER

Hamsters need water available to them all the time. Fill your hamster's 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. Hamsters tend to bury them as they dig, creating a soggy mess.

HANDLING

Handle with care

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



Hamsters are nocturnal. They're active at night. Disturbing your hamster during the day while they're asleep may cause them to get upset and bite.

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HOME ENVIRONMENT



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

Your hamster's living space should include:

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

HABITAT OPTIONS

Hamsters 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 single Syrian or a pair of dwarf hamsters. 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 hamster to burrow. Clean toilet areas every other day and the entire cage once a week.

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 hamster's home interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material like toilet paper for your hamster to gather.

WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO PUT YOUR HAMSTER'S 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 hamster. 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.

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EXERCISE & PLAY

TOYS & GAMES

Hamsters 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 hamster busy and interested. Paper bags, cereal boxes, paper cups, toilet paper rolls and untreated wood are good choices. Always supervise playtime.



SINGLE OR SOCIAL?

Syrian hamsters like living on their own and should be housed by themselves. Otherwise they will fight.

Dwarf hamsters are more social. Two or more can live together provided they're the same sex and have a large habitat. To help prevent squabbles, dwarf hamsters kept in pairs should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they're very young. Even then, they may still end up fighting and have to be permanently separated.



Which wheel?

When choosing a wheel, solid surfaces (like all-plastic wheels) are safer and more comfortable than wire ones, which can hurt hamster feet. As for size, when hamsters 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.



WHAT ABOUT HAMSTER BALLS?

While they may look like fun, hamster balls are actually not very safe for hamsters. They can easily be kicked, fall down stairs or forgotten about.

FIRST ADOPTION OPTION

Interested in adding a hamster to your family? [Make adoption your first option!](#) BC SPCA Community Animal Centres often have hamsters 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 HAMSTER HEALTH

A HEALTHY HAMSTER

- ✓ 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



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

DENTAL CARE



To help wear down their ever-growing front teeth, provide your hamster 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.



TOILET TRAINING

Most hamsters will use one corner or area as a toilet area. You can buy a hamster-sized litter box at a pet supply store, or use an appropriately sized glass jar turned on its side. Place some soiled bedding in the litter box to encourage your hamster to use it.



TOO MANY HAMSTERS!

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

PREVENT UNWANTED LITTERS

Never keep male and female hamsters together, even for a short period. Hamsters multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 10 litters in just one year, with anywhere from four to 12 young per litter. Baby hamsters need to be separated by sex at five weeks of age before they begin breeding.

