PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

Common health problems in hamsters include:

- **Wet tail.** Symptoms of this bacterial infection include lethargy, diarrhea, loss of appetite, a ruffled coat or wetness around the tail. See a vet immediately. This infection can rapidly lead to death.
- **Maloccluded (overgrown) teeth.** If a hamster's incisors grow too long, they cause pain and prevent the hamster from eating. See a vet. Teeth may need to be filed or clipped.
- **Parasites,** the most common being lice and mites. Symptoms include repeated scratching, hair loss and inflamed skin. See a vet. Treatment may require a topical medication and/or injections.
- **The common cold.** As this illness can be passed from human to hamster, affected humans should avoid handling hamsters. Symptoms include labored breathing, eye and nostril discharge, lethargy, reduced appetite and sneezing or coughing. See a vet immediately. (These symptoms could also be indicative of a **respiratory infection**.)

Annual veterinary examinations are recommended. Weigh your hamster weekly to ensure that their weight is stable. Weight loss is a common symptom of serious illness.

Visit a vet immediately if your hamster has any of the following symptoms: reduced appetite, diarrhea, no feces, drooling, bloating, lethargy, difficulty urinating, itchiness or hair loss.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more comprehensive information on hamster care, visit:

- thesprucepets.com
- petmd.com
- rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rodents/hamsters
- seavs.com

Area Vets

Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services
4015 Rust Rd.
Fairfax, VA 22030
(703) 491-1111

Pender Veterinary Clinic
4001 Legato Rd.
Fairfax, VA 22033
(703) 654-3100

Paws, Purrs & Exotics
5838-A North Kings Highway
Alexandria, VA 22303
(703) 549-7297

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tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9

Animal Welfare League of Arlington

2650 Arlington Mill Dr.
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: 703-931-9241
www.awla.org
mail@awla.org

CARING FOR HAMSTERS

A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE



ANIMAL WELFARE LEAGUE OF ARLINGTON



DIET

Food

- A commercial hamster pellet or rodent block diet, such as **Oxbow Hamster and Gerbil Diet,** should be available for your hamster at all times and comprise the majority of the diet. Provide ⅛ cup of pellets per day.
- Fruits (e.g. banana, strawberry, apple without seeds or peel), vegetables (e.g. broccoli, carrot, cucumber), grains, unsweetened cereal and timothy hay or orchard grass can be given as treats. These should not exceed 10% of the diet.

Do not feed hamsters commercial treat sticks, almonds, peanuts, uncooked beans, tomato greens, onions, citrus, or unwashed fruits or vegetables. Avoid excessive amounts of seeds, as they are high in fat.

Water

- Provide water in a commercially available water bottle or bowl. Change water daily.

HOUSING AND GENERAL CARE

Caging

- Cages should provide a minimum of 1 by 3 feet of space per hamster.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.
- A wire bar cage is optimal, but hamsters can be housed in aquariums as long at they are cleaned multiple times per week.

Housing more than one hamster in the same enclosure is **not recommended**, as they are prone to fighting.

Environment

Hamster cages should contain:

- A hiding place, such as an upturned cardboard box, paper towel roll or commercially available plastic igloo.
- A commercially available running wheel. Vegetable oil or coconut oil can be used to lubricate the wheel's moving parts.
- Safe materials, such as non-toxic cardboard, untreated wood or commercially available chew toys, to encourage natural chewing behavior and prevent dental disease.
- Unlimited access to water in a water bottle and hamster pellets in a bowl. Check water bottle daily to ensure that it is functioning and your hamster is drinking.

Hamster cages should not be placed in direct sunlight or in a drafty area. The optimal temperature for hamster housing is 72–80°F.

Bedding

- Hamster cages should be lined with 1–2 inches of a paper-based bedding such as Carefresh. Fleece or towels can be used as a substitute. Do not use wood shavings or cat litter.
- Bedding should be spot cleaned daily and changed weekly. Wash cage components thoroughly.

BEHAVIOR

- Hamsters are nocturnal animals and are most active during the night.
- Hamsters are prone to biting as a natural defense, especially when startled awake.
- Because of their poor eyesight, hamsters use their whiskers to assess their surroundings. **Never** trim a hamster's whiskers.
- Hamsters are inclined to hibernate, especially due to environmental changes such as a drop in temperature. Keep the temperature of your hamster's environment constant to prevent this.

Handling

- When picking up a hamster, support its body with both hands. Do not allow small children to handle hamsters without adult supervision.
- When allowing a hamster to explore outside its cage, be sure to do so in a closed-off area. Keep harmful products and dangerous objects out of reach.

