



HAMSTER CARE

The Golden / Syrian hamster is a small rodent with pets in the UK today originating from hamsters bred in Jerusalem. These hamsters are popular pets due to their lack of odour, but are generally nocturnal and may bite, so should be handled carefully. They can live between 1.5 - 2.5 years if looked after correctly. Other less commonly kept species include the Chinese (*Cricetulus griseus*) and the Russian (*Phodopus sungorus*) hamsters which are smaller and generally more social species. This care sheet will concentrate on the care of Syrian hamsters but similar care is required for the others.

ACCOMMODATION

- Hamsters should be housed in a large glass or plastic tank with good ventilation, and a deep layer of sawdust or shavings to allow burrowing behaviour.
- A nest box should also be provided as a retreat, with paper or hay bedding. Cotton wool should not be used as bedding material as this can be easily impacted in cheek pouches.
- Hamsters are very active and inquisitive animals so within the cage, wheels and toys should be provided. However, be aware that toys will be quickly destroyed, so replaceable cardboard rolls and boxes often provide the best entertainment. Wheels should also be of a solid type to prevent injuries.
- Temperature – ensure that the tank is kept out of direct sunlight as these enclosures will easily overheat.
- The tank should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease, especially the nest box as hamsters are prone to hoard food here.

COMPANIONS

- Syrian hamsters are solitary animals, and will fight if kept together.
- In contrast, Chinese and Russian species can be more social so may be kept in pairs or single sex groups, but should be monitored carefully for any signs of fighting.

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WHAT TO FEED

- Small portion of hay daily to be placed in the cage daily.
- 1 handful of leafy vegetables
- ¼ table spoon of rat pellets (per rat) to be given in TOTAL to be scattered in the pen **DO NOT OVER FEED** this can result in obesity.

- Fresh water in all water bottles daily
- Twice a week give treats: 1 small cricket or 2 meal worms, cottage cheese, or ¼ table spoon of rat or hamster mix, fruit scattered in the pen.
- Water should always be freely available via a drinking bottle and changed daily.

VACCINATIONS

- No routine vaccinations are currently recommended for hamsters

NEUTERING

- Male hamsters may be castrated in order to reduce fighting, or prevent reproduction

PARASITES

- No routine parasite prevention is currently recommended for hamsters

SIGNS OF ILL HEALTH

- As hamsters are a prey species they will hide disease, so the first time you see any signs you must act quickly.
- A healthy hamster will be bright and alert with clear open eyes, ears and nostrils. Your hamster should also be keen to eat and drink, and pass faeces regularly.
- It is important to become familiar with your hamster's normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage. It is advisable to visit a vet who routinely deals with hamsters for a general health check at least once a year.
- You should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, coat condition or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth.
- If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a hamster vet as soon as possible.