

## Common Health Issues

### Tail injury:

Minor accidents can cause detachment of part of the tail. If your Gerbil appears to be in distress or pain, consult your vet.

### Otitis Media:

A middle ear infection that causes imbalance – your Gerbil will keep going round in circles. Seek veterinary advice straightaway.

### Tyzzler's Disease:

The most serious disease your Gerbil can suffer from. Symptoms include lethargy, loss of appetite, and diarrhoea. Consult your vet immediately – the disease can be fatal.

### Overgrown teeth:

Like all rodents, a Gerbil's incisors grow continuously so make sure yours has something to gnaw on – this helps wear the teeth. If the teeth become overgrown your vet can advise about trimming occasionally.

### Sore eyes or nose:

Usually caused by dust or grit, but consult your vet if symptoms persist as your Gerbil may require antibiotics.

### Wet Tail:

A form of stress-related diarrhoea common in newly weaned Gerbils. Seek veterinary advice.

### Duty of Care:

Every owner has a duty of care towards their animal. People should not take on the responsibility of keeping a pet unless they have the means to provide it with appropriate care and attention. This includes providing specialist treatment in the case of sickness or injury to prevent unnecessary suffering. Owners should arrange for their animal to be taken to a vet as soon as it becomes ill and be prepared to pay for any treatment themselves.

# Keeping Gerbils As Pets

## Gerbils:

Inquisitive, friendly animals that rarely bite, Gerbils make good pets for children. They are easy to look after, hygienic, and sociable. They also love digging! Unlike hamsters, Gerbils should not be kept on their own but in same sex pairs or groups. They generally live for 3 to 5 years and are most active during the evening and at night.



## Housing

Gerbils in the wild live underground in tunnels, so you should aim to create a similar environment for your domestic pet. A purpose-built Gerbil cage is the best option, although a glass aquarium can be used, provided a wire mesh lid is fitted to allow ventilation.

Your Gerbil's home should be kept out of direct sunlight and away from draughts.

Shredded paper nesting material should be provided, along with wood shavings or sawdust. As Gerbils are naturally desert creatures, they use food and water efficiently and therefore produce little waste. The cage should be cleaned once a week - a small litter tray can be provided to help keep a hygienic environment for your Gerbil.

## Types of Gerbil

There are a number of species of Gerbil; however the Mongolian Gerbil is the one to keep as a pet. Unlike Rats or Mice, Gerbils have hairy tails.

## Feeding

A good quality Gerbil mix makes an ideal core diet for your pet. This can be supplemented with small pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables. Be aware that Gerbils hoard food, so don't give them too many green vegetables (which can rot). Fresh drinking water should always be available, usually in a gravity bottle although a small heavy bowl can be used instead. Like all rodents, a Gerbil's front teeth grow continuously, so provide them with something to gnaw on. You should never feed your Gerbil potatoes, rhubarb, or tomato leaves.

## Looking after your Gerbil

### Exercise & Entertainment:

Most active during the evening and night, Gerbils enjoy cardboard tubes to run through and chew on, and they love to dig and burrow so provide plenty of bedding for this purpose. They also enjoy climbing – a fruit branch is ideal.

### Handling:

Gerbils usually enjoy human contact but can occasionally be timid. If this is the case, hold your hand in the cage without touching your Gerbil – this allows it to get used to your scent – then gently stroke your pet. You can pick up a Gerbil by placing your hand gently around its body behind the front legs whilst supporting the hindquarters with your other hand. Be warned though – they can move and jump surprisingly quickly, so always handle them above a soft surface that won't harm them should they fall. Never pick up a Gerbil by its tail as serious injury can result.

### Breeding:

Gerbils can breed extremely quickly from 3 months old, producing a litter every 24 days! You should therefore seek expert advice before considering keeping a breeding pair and only if you're certain you can find good homes for the babies.

## Tips for a happy healthy Gerbil

### Community:

Unlike hamsters, Gerbils naturally live in groups. Two or more Gerbils of the same sex, from the same litter, should get on well. Adult Gerbils – females especially – can be territorial so if introducing an older Gerbil, proceed carefully. Dividing the cage with a wire screen is the best way – your Gerbils will be able to see and smell each other without any danger of fighting. Swap them around to spread their scent throughout the whole cage; after 3 or 4 days it should be safe to remove the screen.

### Health:

A healthy Gerbil will be alert, have bright eyes, and a glossy coat. They are generally healthy creatures but as with all pets, if you are worried about any aspect of your Gerbil's health, seek veterinary advice. For a healthy life, your Gerbil needs the following:

- A good balanced diet with no sudden changes
- Clean dry housing, cleaned once a week with a mild disinfectant
- No extreme or sudden changes in temperature
- Water bottle and feed bowls cleaned daily
- Gnawing block or fruit tree branch to help wear their continually growing teeth
- Plenty of wood shavings and bedding for burrowing and digging

