

Common Health Issues

Injury from falls

The Hamster's most common health issue – always handle your pet carefully to avoid falls. If your Hamster does have a fall, return it to its nest straightaway and leave it alone for an hour. If it still seems distressed or in pain, consult your vet.

Permanently stuffed cheeks:

Hamsters store food in their cheek pouches which can occasionally become impacted, resulting in infection. Seek veterinary advice – your Hamster may need antibiotics.

Colds:

Hamsters are prone to colds so if you catch a cold yourself, avoid handling your pet until your symptoms have passed.

Loss of fur and sore skin:

Usually caused by simple aging but occasionally skin parasites can be to blame. Seek advice from your vet if you are worried about the condition.

Overgrown teeth:

Like all rodents, a Hamster'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.

Runny eyes:

Usually caused by dust or grit, but could also be conjunctivitis. Bathe the eyes gently from inner to outer corners with cotton wool soaked in warm sterile water (boil water and then allow to cool off).

Extreme temperatures:

If the temperature drops below 8-10 degrees c, your Hamster may attempt to hibernate – move the cage to a warmer spot; this should revive him. Temperatures above 25 degrees c can cause similar symptoms: your Hamster may appear dead. Again, relocate the cage to a stable temperature and your Hamster should recover.

Wet Tail:

A form of stress-related diarrhoea common in newly weaned Hamsters. 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 Hamsters As Pets

Hamsters:

The most popular and best known small rodent pets, Hamsters are naturally solitary creatures that prefer their own company, although same sex pairs can be kept together. They generally live for 2 to 3 years and are most active during the evening and at night.



Housing

There's a vast choice of Hamster houses available, ranging from simple cages to complex multi-level stacking systems with interconnecting tunnels.

Your Hamster'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. The cage should be cleaned at least once a week and a small litter tray can be provided, helping to maintain a hygienic environment for your Hamster.

Types of Hamster

The most common (and largest) breed is the Syrian, or Golden, Hamster. Remember they are naturally solitary and prefer to be kept alone. Russian or Dwarf Hamsters are smaller, growing to about 8cm while Chinese Hamsters are slightly longer when fully grown. If you must keep a pair, make sure they are the same sex and do not mix species.

Feeding

A good quality Hamster mix makes an ideal core diet for your pet. This can be supplemented with small pieces of fresh fruit and vegetables. Be aware that Hamsters hoard food in their beds, 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 Hamster's front teeth grow continuously, so provide them with something to gnaw on – dog biscuits are ideal.

Looking after your Hamster

Exercise & Entertainment:

Most active during the evening and night, Hamsters enjoy cardboard tubes to run through and chew on, or a wooden ledge to climb on. Wire-spoked Hamster wheels are not recommended; solid wheels are much safer. Hamster 'exercise balls' should be used with care – your Hamster can soon become exhausted.

Handling:

Most Hamsters that have been correctly handled from an early age will usually enjoy human contact and rarely bite. If your Hamster seems nervous, hold your hand in the cage without touching it – this allows it to get used to your scent. As with all pets, the rule is to be gentle and approach carefully with no sudden movements. Never put your hand into your Hamster's bed in case you startle it. It's always best to wake your hamster first with a treat, then scoop him up in your hands along with a little bedding until it becomes accustomed to you. Long haired hamsters will require daily grooming, which can be integrated with handling.

Breeding:

Hamsters can breed extremely quickly from a very young age and will produce a litter every few weeks. 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 Hamster

Community:

One Syrian Hamster on its own is a happy creature. Two or more means frequent fighting, so keep this species alone. Russian and Chinese Hamsters prefer company so should be kept in same sex pairs or small groups. Do not mix species.

Health:

As with all pets, if you are worried about any aspect of your Hamster's health, seek veterinary advice. Hamsters are short-sighted, so if you let yours out of its cage, watch it closely. For a healthy life, your Hamster 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 blocks and chew toys to help wear their continually growing teeth

