

Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

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Care of Gerbils

Introduction: Gerbils are native to the desert regions of Mongolia and northeastern China and live in burrows. They often live in groups. Gerbils are clean, friendly and nearly odorless. Gerbils can exist peacefully with others, but will fight with intruders. It is best to introduce gerbils together when they are very young. Typical lifespan in captivity is 3-4 years.

Captivity Requirements: Gerbils should be housed in escape-proof, wire mesh rodent enclosure with a plastic or metal solid base. Wire bottoms should be avoided to prevent foot injury. Aquariums and plastic commercial hamster cages may be used, but they are more difficult to keep clean. Bedding should be 2-3" deep, non-allergenic, dust free, absorbent, and nontoxic. Shredded paper, recycled newspaper pellets or wood shavings can be used. Avoid cedar shavings. Bedding should be changed at least 1-2 times per week or as often as needed. Temperature should be kept between 65°-80°F.

Diet: Gerbils should be fed a high quality commercial pelleted or block diet. We recommend Healthy Handful pellets, made by Oxbow Pet Products (www.oxboypet.com). This line of food can be purchased in some pet stores. All food should be offered free choice. Diets that contain dried fruit and seeds should be avoided as they tend to lead to obesity in adult gerbils. Fresh water should be available through a bottle or bowl at all times. Healthy table foods, such as grains, fresh vegetables and some fruit, may be offered as well, making up to 10% of the diet.

Diseases:

- Gerbils are generally resistant to disease. The most common illnesses are from injuries, and respiratory and heart disease.