

Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic

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Care of Hamsters

Introduction: Hamsters are members of the rodent family and are related to the wild golden hamsters, native to the Middle East, where they live solitary lives in deep burrows. They are generally nocturnal. Hamsters are best kept alone and are usually gentle if handled carefully. Typical lifespan in captivity is 2-3 years.

Captivity Requirements: Hamsters 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 and provide less ventilation. 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: Hamsters should be fed a high quality commercial pelleted or block diet. We recommend Healthy Handful pellets, made by Oxbow Pet Products (www.oxboylhay.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 limited as they tend to lead to obesity in adult hamsters. 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:

- Skin tumors: Many rodent species are prone to tumors. Many can be treated, though the sooner they are discovered and removed, the better.
- Cardiac Disease: Heart disease is common in older hamsters, and may cause lethargy or weakness.
- Enteritis: Also known as "Wet Tail," this chronic diarrhea can be caused by a variety of bacteria, protozoa and/or parasites.

Yearly exams should be performed by a veterinarian to assess your hamster's health. Spays and neuters can be performed on hamsters. This allows males and females not intended for breeding to be housed together.