



Warren Woods Veterinary Hospital

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Hamster: Care and Husbandry

Hamsters are small nocturnal rodents originally from Syria. Their life span is 2-3 years and they prefer to be housed alone. Syrian hamsters often called "Teddy Bear" or "Golden" hamsters, Dwarf hamsters which include Russian and Chinese species, are the most common varieties found at pet stores. They come in an assortment of colors including black, white, brown and patterned varieties.



Well socialized hamsters make great pets for children. They are very curious and entertaining. Hamsters can be friendly, well mannered pets if they have been frequently and gently handled from a young age. Make sure to purchase your hamster from a breeder or pet store that spends time socializing their hamsters. Always wake your hamster before picking it up so it is not startled. Scoop a hamster from underneath with both hands to support its body when picking it up. Hamsters can be wiggly especially when as young. Children should sit on the floor when holding their hamsters as a long fall can be very harmful.

Your hamster should be fed rodent blocks or lab blocks which are a fortified rodent diet that can be found at your local pet store. A seed mix may be given, but caution is advised as seeds are fattening. Treats for your hamster can include vegetables fruits, noodles, breads, unsweetened cereals and commercial hamster treats. The water bottle or water dish should be kept clean and refilled daily. Avoid sudden or drastic changes to the diet as this may lead to diarrhea.

There is a wide variety of cages available at your local pet store. A ten gallon glass aquarium with a screen lid is acceptable but will not provide good ventilation. There is a wide selection of multi-level wire cages that have attachments and tubes for your hamster to explore. Always be sure to latch cage doors and secure cage attachments so your hamster can not escape from its enclosure. Bedding should be made of recycled paper material. Litters made of wood shaving may be irritating to the hamster's mucus membranes, skin and respiratory tract. Wood shavings may also be contaminated with pesticides or parasites. A hide house should be present, this can be homemade from a cardboard box or purchased from your local pet store. The cage should be cleaned as needed with a mild soap and rinsed thoroughly.

Hamsters can get bored very quickly if not provided proper enrichment, toys are a great way to keep your hamster entertained and happy. Acceptable toys include cardboard, toilet paper rolls or plastic and wood toys purchased from your local pet store. Always monitor that your hamster is not ingesting any parts of the toys. A hamster's teeth are constantly growing, however, the natural alignment of their teeth when chewing and grinding keeps them at a proper, healthy length. A solid bottom exercise wheel is also a great toy for your hamster. A hamster ball is recommended for play time outside of the cage; this is a clear plastic ball with slots for ventilation that's designed for your hamster to be able to run around the room without hiding or escaping. Do not leave your hamster in its ball unattended. There are many ways your hamster can get injured for example by falling down stairs or by other pets or young children that might knock the ball and your hamster.

To ensure your hamster lives a long and healthy life, it should see a qualified exotic veterinarian every six months to a year. Common diseases seen in hamsters include wet tail, malocclusion, tumors, respiratory infections, skin diseases, mites and mange.