

Exotic small mammals

A guide for pet owners
from Nationwide® pet insurance



Congratulations on your new pet

Learn the essentials of caring for your rabbit, ferret, rat, guinea pig, mouse, chinchilla or other exotic small mammal.

Healthy start

Providing regular veterinary care from the start is the best way to ensure a lifetime of good health.

Finding a veterinarian

Take your new pet for a complete checkup with a veterinarian experienced in treating exotic pets. While any licensed veterinarian can examine your exotic pet, it is best to find a professional who is experienced in seeing, treating, and performing surgery on these unique animals.

If a problem is particularly complex or you're seeking a specialist, search for one in your area at <https://abvp.com/animal-owners/find-an-abvp-specialist/>.

Separate to protect

Until they receive a clean bill of health from the veterinarian, new pets should be kept away from other pets.

Diet and nutrition

Rabbits, chinchillas and guinea pigs

- Offer unlimited hay (timothy or other grass hay)
- Pellets may be offered in limited amounts

- Guinea pigs require vitamin C in their diets and must get it from fresh fruits and veggies; additional supplementation may be necessary

Ferrets, mice, rats and hamsters

- Ferrets are carnivores, so they should eat a diet formulated specifically for their species
- Mice, rats and hamsters should also be offered a species-specific pelleted diet

All small mammals

- Provide clean, fresh water from a bottle or bowl your pet is willing and able to drink from
- Small mammals have very specialized GI tracts, so don't give too many treats or other high-sugar foods

Habitat

Enclosures

- All small mammals should be kept in a secure enclosure when they're not being directly supervised
- Choose a cage, pen or aquarium that can be easily cleaned, and talk to your veterinarian about the best cleaning methods
- Look for enclosures with enough room for exercise

Flooring and bedding

- Enclosure floors should be solid to protect feet
- Provide clean, soft bedding for padding
- Clean bedding regularly to remove feces and urine

Playtime equipment

- Hamsters, mice and rats: Wheels and tubes to run in
- Chinchillas: Wheels with no bars (to protect feet), and access to a pan of commercial chinchilla dust to roll around in multiple times a week
- Ferrets: Hammocks or folded fabrics for burrowing, as long as chewing and ingestion of cloth is not an issue for your ferret

Handling

Enclosures

- Rabbits: Always support their backs to prevent accidental injury; never lift by the ears
- Guinea pigs: Hold with two hands—one supporting the chest, one supporting the hind end
- Chinchillas: Hold with two hands, using care never to grab their tail or ears
- Mice and hamsters: Wear gloves or use a small towel to pick up these small, quick little animals

Roommates

While hamsters prefer to live alone, some ferrets, rabbits, chinchillas, rats and mice may enjoy living with other members of their species.

If keeping more than one pet in the same enclosure, exercise caution; even young males and females can breed and animals who are housed together often fight. Talk to your veterinarian for advice.

If you still want your pet to have a friend, new animals should be introduced slowly and monitored closely.

Staying healthy

Since many small mammals are prey species, they often hide symptoms of illness or injury. An annual veterinary exam is important for catching problems before they become serious.

Rabbits, guinea pigs and chinchillas have sensitive stomachs. It's important that they eat and defecate regularly; any decrease in appetite or feces can be a sign of illness.

Rabbits produce two kinds of feces: small, hard pellets during the day and softer cecotrophs, or "night droppings," at night. They eat the soft droppings to re-ingest the nutrients, so you usually won't see them.

All rodents and rabbits have teeth that grow continually throughout their lives. Provide safe, species-appropriate toys for chewing, and have teeth checked routinely. A veterinarian can trim teeth if necessary.

Play close attention to your pet's normal behavior, appetite, urine and feces production. If you notice any changes, call your veterinarian.

Pet Poison Helpline

If you think your pet has been exposed to something harmful, please call your veterinarian or Pet Poison Helpline immediately.

Pet Poison Helpline
855-289-0358

Available 24/7

Please be advised that a one-time, per-incident consultation fee applies.

In an emergency

Assess the situation so you can communicate clearly with your veterinarian. Most importantly, don't administer at-home treatment without first seeking veterinary advice.

Get help

If your pet is unconscious, convulsing or having difficulty breathing, go immediately to the nearest emergency veterinary hospital. While they are stabilizing your pet, call Pet Poison Helpline at 855-289-0358 for treatment recommendations.



We're here to help

Nationwide® offers pet insurance coverage for accidents, illnesses and preventive care

This educational pamphlet is provided by Nationwide in coordination with Pet Poison Helpline, an animal poison control center based out of Minneapolis, Minn. Driven by our shared passion for pets, our common goal is to provide pet lovers with valuable information on pet health and safety.

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