

Lifespan

With good care the average lifespan is about 2 years.

Behaviors

There are a variety of hamster varieties from small, very active dwarf hamsters to the larger teddy bear hamsters. Hamsters are fast and can bite so they are not always the best pets for small children. A well socialized hamster will not bite as readily and may be a good choice for older (3rd grade or older) children. Dwarf hamsters can sometimes be kept together if they were raised together and the same gender, however some will still fight and will need to be separated. Males should not be kept with females unless they are neutered because they breed readily and have large amounts of babies. Syrian hamsters should always be kept separately as they are too territorial.



Housing

Hamsters need a solid bottom cage at least one-foot-long with a lot of ventilation. The cage must be escape proof as hamsters are master escape artists! The plastic bottomed cages with wire tops that you can attach tubes to work very well. Aquarium style cages are not appropriate due to poor ventilation. Hamsters urinate and defecate a lot so their cage should be cleaned frequently (at least 1-2 times weekly) to reduce waste odor and contamination.

Carefresh (recycled shredded paper) bedding is the best option to use at the bottom of the cage at least 1-2" deep. Hamsters will nest in the bedding and will shred toilet paper if offered to line their nest. Toilet paper rolls offer great hiding places and rats enjoy destroying them as well. Cardboard, wooden chews, grass hay, newspaper, and other destructible toys (avoid plastic) provide good chewing opportunities.

They will chew wood and plastic so only ceramic or metal dishes should be used. Water bowls get very dirty so water bottles attached to the side of the cage should be used. Make sure that fresh water is available at all times. Periodically check the corners and edges of the cage to ensure that they have not started chewing any holes that may lead to escape.

A solid sided exercise wheel in the cage should be available for exercise. Time outside of the cage to explore a safe area is great enrichment. Exercise balls are very popular but use with caution around stairs or other pets.

Diet and Nutrition

There are many varieties of hamster mixes, which will generally have a blend of fruits, vegetables and seeds and grains. Hamsters will hoard food and store it in their cheek pouches. Then later they will push it all out and eat it at their leisure. You can also offer vegetables to nibble on, most commonly leafy greens like lettuces.

Signs of Illness

"Wet tail" is a bacterial disease that causes diarrhea, which sticks to the tail, in hamsters. It progresses quickly to cause dangerous levels of dehydration. Antibiotics are effective at treating it so if any signs of wet tail are seen seek veterinary care.

The cheek pouches are used to hold food but occasionally they can get an impacted cheek pouch that becomes infected. Signs of this are a hard cheek pouch that does not get smaller or empty, redness around the cheek or mouth, or a foul odor coming from the mouth.