



### **About Your Hamster:**

Hamsters are easy to care for, clean and if handled correctly and frequently they can be friendly and loveable. Hamsters are members of the rodent family and the name Hamster means “to horde.” If you’ve ever seen a hamster with a jowl full of grain you’ll know why they earned this moniker. Sadly hamsters have a short life span, living only 2-3 years.

### **Housing:**

The rule when buying a hamster cage is buy the biggest cage you can afford. Once you get in toys, an exercise wheel, food bowls and a small nesting box, smaller cages can get pretty cramped.

- Conventional wire cages work for larger hamsters, but if you have dwarf hamsters, your pet may squeeze through the openings. These cages can also be drafty. The removable tray underneath is easy to clean, but the cages can be messy because the spaces between bars often allows bedding to be pushed out.
- Aquariums are heavier and somewhat more awkward to clean. A wire mesh lid is best for these types of cages to avoid condensation inside the cage. Avoid placing these cages in sunlight because they have no ventilation and can cause overheating and sunstroke.
- Plastic tube cages –at first glance these look like a high tech hamster paradise. However they can be anything but that for you as you attempt to clean very hard to get at places! These cages too, can have condensation problems, and become more smelly than well-ventilated cages. Tube cages that also have some wire walls are the best bet to prevent condensation and allow ventilation. These are draft proof, and provide hours of viewing pleasure as you watch your hamster play in different compartments.
- Cleaning should be done when you begin to notice the odor building—once a week is a good rule of thumb
- The wrong type of bedding can make your hamster sick and irritate his nasal passages, so avoid cedar and pine bedding. Aspen is the best wood type bedding for hamsters. Unscented and undyed paper (toilet paper or white paper towels) also works well for hamsters to make a nest and burrow into.
- Toilet paper and paper towel tubes along with plain paper cardboard boxes can provide great hiding places for your pet .

**Nutrition:**

Hamster mix found in most pet stores should provide your pet's nutritional needs. A mix without added sugar is preferable. Small quantities of raw vegetables and an occasional bite of fruit are good ways to round out your pet's diet. Dwarf hamsters can be susceptible to diabetes—so avoid sweet fruits or treats for these tiny pets.

Water crocks often get filled with bedding, so your best bet might be a water bottle with a ball bearing spout. One food dish per hamster is advised so no fighting or territorial spats occur.

**Toys:**

Your hamster needs exercise, so a running wheel is important. A solid wheel with no open rungs can keep your pet from getting feet or tails caught in the wheel. Hamster balls are often big hits with children since the hamster can run around the house enclosed in his bubble. Make sure to supervise this activity to ensure the hamster doesn't end up going down the stairs, or chased by the family dog. (Hamsters have also been known to knock the ball into the wall hard enough to jar off the end cap—and escape.) Wooden or cardboard tubes and boxes provide nesting and hiding opportunities but these will need to be replaced—your hamster will use them for gnawing as well. Finally ramps and ladders can be fun—just make sure your lid is firmly attached to the cage so your little Houdini doesn't gain access to the top of the cage and push the lid aside.

**Getting to know your pet:**

Like any animal your hamster might be a bit shy at first. Handle your pet gently, speak softly and let your hamster get to know your scent gradually. Hamsters don't see well and rely on their keen senses of smell and hearing to learn about their new environment. Hamsters are generally more sedentary than gerbils—however if your pet seems extremely lethargic—or you suspect any health problems, consult your veterinarian.