



A Compassionate Commitment to Quality Pet Care!

HAMSTER CARE

Mesocricetus auratus (Golden or Syrian hamster), *Cricetulus griseus* (Chinese dwarf hamster), *Phodopus sungorus spp.* (Russian, Winter White, and Campbell hamsters). Hamsters are small, soft-furred, nearly tailless rodents that originated in the Middle-East and southeastern Europe. The normal life span of most hamsters is about 1-2 years.

HANDLING AND RESTRAINT

Hamsters handled gently from an early age usually remain docile and rarely bite. Those hamsters with a docile temperament and with no history of biting can simply be picked up with a bare hand and held cupped in the palm(s). However, many hamsters develop an untrustworthy personality and begin to bite after rough handling, when awakened or when disturbed suddenly. A gloved hand or small towel can be used to catch and lift biting hamsters. Grasping as much skin as you can from behind the head (scruff) can be used to lift a hamster -- **this can be dangerous as a hamster has plenty of loose skin and can actually twist around in your grasp and bite while you hold him by the scruff.** Use this method only for quick transportation of the hamster from one container to another.

HOUSING

Hamsters can be housed in enclosures made of glass, stainless steel or wire. The first two are preferred as they resist corrosion. All- glass aquariums make good hamster enclosures when topped with a secure wire mesh that allows adequate ventilation. Wood and plastic enclosures are not recommended -- they do not withstand gnawing and are nearly impossible to clean properly. The best enclosure will not have sharp edges or other hazards. Solid floors are best. Many pet stores sell enclosures with interconnecting tubes and plenty of play space; these can make good hamster homes, however they can be difficult to clean and disinfect.

The proper size is roomy enough for the rodents to pursue normal living with plenty of room for exercise (about 20 square inches per hamster is recommended). Hamsters are territorial and should be housed alone, with the exception of some dwarf hamsters which will tolerate the company of another member of the same sex. This however is the exception; most mature hamsters will fight and injure each other if housed together. Providing wheels and climbing areas is a good idea. Never use wire exercise wheels- the hamster can easily injure itself by catching a foot through the bars. Visual security (a place to hide like a box or inverted plant pot) is important to the well-being of hamsters. Hamsters enjoy climbing, crawling through small spaces and exercising on wheels.

The best substrates (the litter on the floor of the enclosure) are non-toxic, easily replaced and readily available, dust free and absorbent. Shredded paper and Care Fresh® (a processed, paper product available through veterinarians) are recommended substrates. **Never** use wood shavings (such as cedar and pine), kitty litter, or moss, as these can cause respiratory irritation. Provide cotton or facial tissues (unscented) for nesting material.

We do not recommend allowing pet hamsters freedom within the home. Hamsters are excellent escape artists who rarely return to their enclosure. Once out and loose, hamsters will chew on appliance and telephone cords, furniture, clothing, stored food and anything else that suits them. Hamsters are primarily nocturnal (night active), though they may have short periods of activity during the day.

HYGIENE

The frequency with which the enclosure requires cleaning depends on the number of hamsters, the enclosure's design and the material(s) from which it is made. Change the bedding 2 to 3 times weekly. Clean the enclosure and all toys, wheels, etc. once weekly. Food and water containers need daily washing. Two or more sets of food/water containers are helpful; one set can be used while the other set is put through the dishwasher or other cleaning method. Scrub the enclosure with soap and hot water (use vinegar to dissolve urine sediment) and rinse with dilute chlorine bleach (2

ounces of bleach to 1 gallon of water). Rinse thoroughly with plenty of water and allow to dry completely before returning the rodents to the enclosure. **Remember that bleach does not disinfect well when in contact with organic matter such as feces or old food scraps; clean the enclosure well BEFORE disinfecting.**

FEEDING

Fresh, clean water and good-quality food are required at all times. Feed a high quality commercial hamster diet. Look for a diet with a good mixture of dried vegetables, fruits, pellets, and limited seeds and nuts. Diets high in seeds (especially sunflower seeds) can contribute to obesity. Supplement the diet (up to 15% daily) with fresh vegetables, such as broccoli, carrots, squash, greens, and the occasional small piece of fruit. Place food in ceramic crocks that resist tipping.. Water is best supplied from bottles with sipper tubes. This method reduces contamination, leaving the water above the bedding for easy access. Change the water daily. Wash the bottle with hot water and soap and rinse thoroughly at least weekly.