

HAMSTER CARE

The Golden / Syrian hamster is a popular pet, originally from a small region of the middle east near Jerusalem. These hamsters are popular pets due to their lack of odour, but are generally nocturnal and may bite, so should be handled carefully. They can live between 1.5 - 2.5 years if looked after correctly. Chinese and Russian hamsters are smaller. This care sheet will concentrate on the care of Syrian hamsters but similar care is required for the others.

Longevity: Hamsters can live for 1.5 – 2 years in captivity

Sociability: Syrian hamsters are solitary animals, and will fight if kept together.

- In contrast, Chinese and Russian species can be more social so may be kept in pairs or single sex groups, but a very large enclosure is required to prevent fighting and they should be monitored carefully for any signs of fighting.

Environment: Hamsters are traditionally housed in large plastic tanks with good ventilation, and a deep layer of paper based litter or shavings to allow burrowing behaviour. In the wild they range several miles every day and have complex territories so we encourage you to give them as much space as you possibly can.

- A nest box should also be provided as a retreat, with paper or hay bedding. Fluffy bedding should not be used as bedding material as this can be easily become impacted in cheek pouches.
- Hamsters are very active and inquisitive animals so within the cage, wheels and toys should be provided. However, be aware that toys will be quickly destroyed, so replaceable cardboard rolls and boxes often provide the best entertainment. Wheels should also be of a solid type and suitable size to prevent injuries.
- Temperature – ensure that the tank is kept out of direct sunlight as these enclosures will easily overheat.
- The tank should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease, especially the nest box as hamsters are prone to hoard food here. A small amount of unsoiled bedding can be left in to maintain their scent – this reduces stress.
- Regular exercise outside the tank is recommended but this must be well-supervised to prevent injury or escape – see online for some fantastic and creative ways to enrich your hamster’s life!

Diet: A measured amount of hamster-specific pelleted food is recommended.

- Avoid muesli - type mixes which can cause health problems and which do not provide adequate nutrition.

- Water should always be freely available via a drinking bottle and changed daily.

Preventative healthcare: We recommend annual health checks every year for pet hamsters as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

Insurance: We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.

Common health complaints:

- Trauma – it is really important to give your hamster access to interesting toys and space for exercise but they must be monitored at all times.
- Skin disease is common and can be caused by a variety of different things
- Obesity caused by muesli mixes, seed and nut based treats given to excess and lack of exercise
- Diarrhoea – especially young hamsters. Can be caused by a variety of different things.

