

## HAMSTER CARE

The Golden / Syrian hamster is a small rodent with pets in the UK today originating from hamsters bred in 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 and generally more social species. This care sheet will concentrate on the care of Syrian hamsters but similar care is required for the others.

### HOUSING

- Hamsters should be housed in a large glass or plastic tank with good ventilation, and a deep layer of sawdust or shavings to allow burrowing behaviour.
- A nest box should also be provided as a retreat, with paper or hay bedding. Cotton wool should not be used as bedding material as this can be easily 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 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.
- Regular exercise outside the tank is recommended but this must be well-supervised to prevent injury or escape

### COMPANIONS

- 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 should be monitored carefully for any signs of fighting.

### WHAT TO FEED

- A measured amount of hamster complete pellets or muesli mix (see manufacturer guidelines for details).
- Water should always be freely available via a drinking bottle and changed daily.

## **ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS**

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.