

Hamsters are hugely popular as pets in the UK and worldwide. Despite this, very little is published about their health. As a prey species, hamsters 'hide' signs of illness to protect themselves from predators so owners need to be extra vigilant to spot illness.

This study aimed to investigate the common disorders and causes of death of hamsters in the UK. This information can help owners recognise common illnesses and understand typical durations of lifespan.



Number of hamsters in study

16,605

Average age at death of hamsters in the study

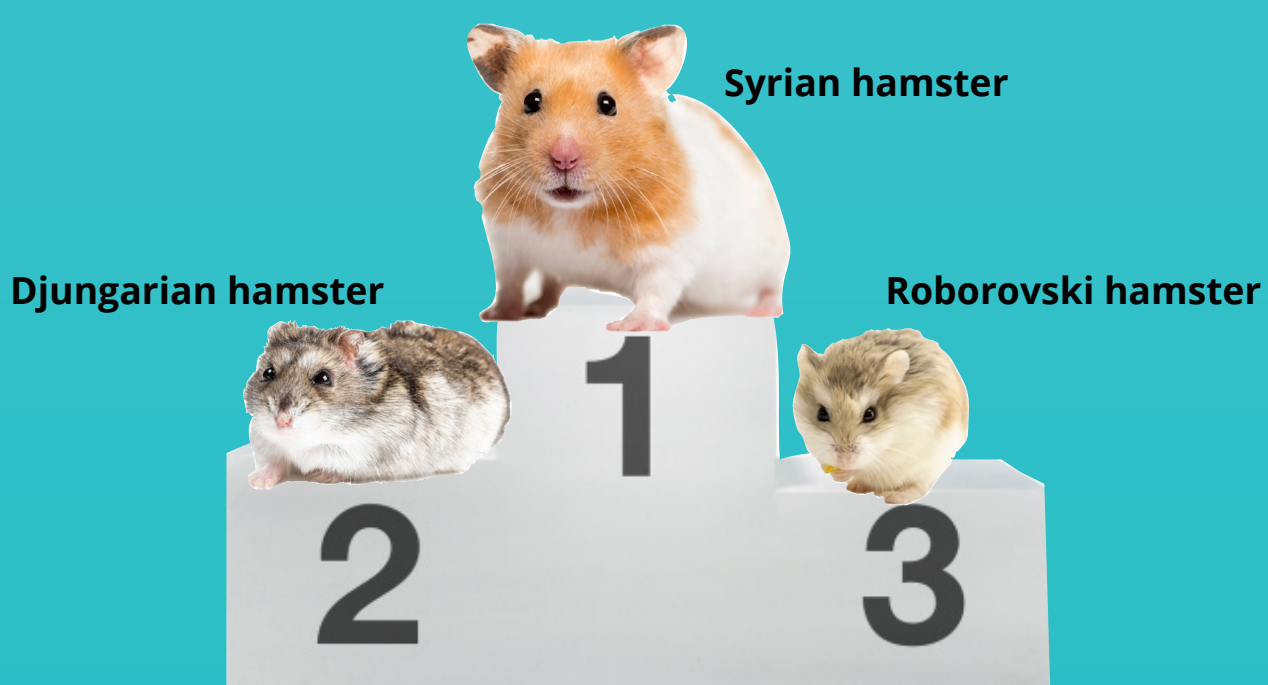
1.75 years  
(21 months)

The average age at death

2.0 years  
Males  
1.67 years  
Females

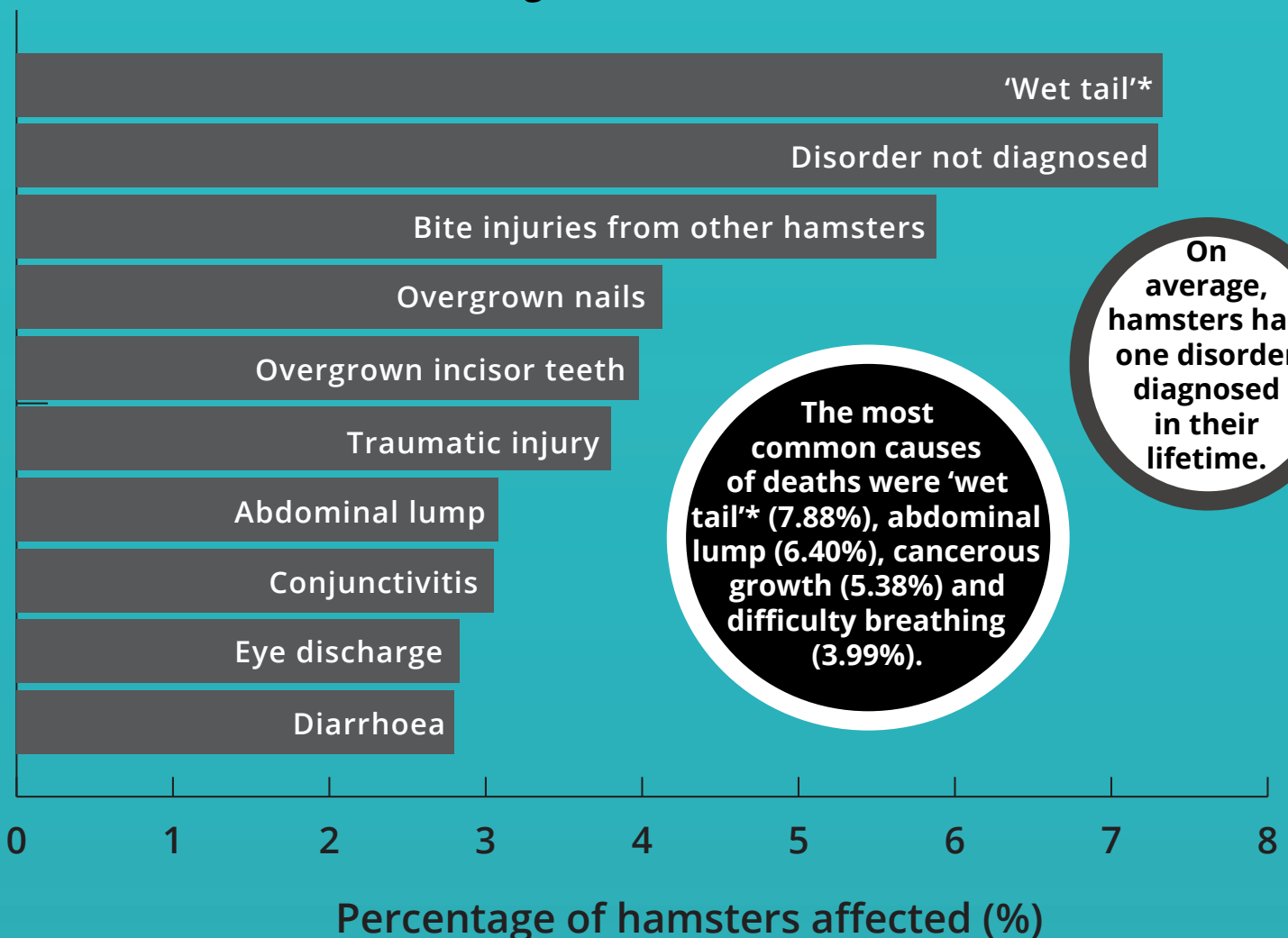
## Most common hamster species

The **Syrian (golden) hamster** (73.45%) was the common species in the UK, followed by **Djungarian (winter white dwarf)** (13.77%) and **Roborovski hamsters** (6.35%).



## Hamster Disorders

Most common disorders diagnosed in hamsters in the UK



The most common causes of deaths were 'wet tail'\* (7.88%), abdominal lump (6.40%), cancerous growth (5.38%) and difficulty breathing (3.99%).

On average, hamsters had one disorder diagnosed in their lifetime.

\*In the context of this study, 'wet tail' describes any liquid discharge or soiling around the back-end of the hamster.

## CONCLUSIONS:

Awareness of typical age of death of 1.75 years can help build realistic expectations for owners (especially children).

The high frequency of nail, dental and trauma problems highlights the importance of good diet, exercise and husbandry to keep hamsters healthy.

Substantially shorter average lifespans for female hamsters suggests that owners should be vigilant for age-related health problems earlier in female hamsters.

This research can encourage owners with sick hamsters to seek prompt veterinary attention.

[CLICK TO READ THE FULL STUDY](#)

O'Neill et al. (2022) "Demography, disorders and mortality of pet hamsters under primary veterinary care in the UK in 2016" Journal of Small Animal Practice  
RVC VetCompass <https://www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass> carries out welfare research based on anonymised clinical information shared from over 30% of UK veterinary practices. We are very grateful to the owners and veterinary professionals who contribute to VetCompass research.