

# Hamsters

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Hamsters are cute little pets who don't require a lot of care. Watching a hamster stuff food into its cheek pouches is a lot of fun. It is also fun to watch a hamster climb through a series of tubes and run on its exercise wheel.

There are two species of hamsters commonly sold as pets, the better known Syrian hamster, about 6-8" long, and the dwarf Russian hamster, never larger than 4" long. The Syrian hamster comes in many different colors and coat types, including the longhaired teddy bear hamster.

Hamsters are easy to care for and make good pets for adults and older children.

One hamster, or more?

Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and can only be kept one to a cage. Dwarf Russian hamsters are more social, and can live in groups as long as they are introduced when young, and the cage is large enough.

## **Feeding**

The basic hamster diet should be a commercial rodent block or fortified grain mix. You can also give hamsters small amounts of fruit or veggies and other healthy foods. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your hamsters and can comprise 10% of their diet.

## **Housing**

A hamster cage can be made of wire, plastic, or glass. It is probably best to choose a combination of wire and plastic for the best ventilation. Some hamsters have a tendency to chew on plastic, and all hamsters have a tendency to try to escape their cage, so make sure it is secure. For bedding you can choose from aspen shavings or pet litter of recycled paper or organic pellets. Do not use clay litter or cedar shavings. Some hamsters will use a special hamster litter box.

## **Accessories**

Hamsters need a water bottle, a dry food dispenser and a dish for moist food. For their bed choose from plastic, wood, or grass houses and/or a hammock or sleeping bag. They need an exercise wheel, and also enjoy tubes, climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

## **Sanitation**

Clean the cage and accessories weekly. Be sure to remove all stored food and scrub all parts of the water bottle.

## **Health care**

With proper care and diet, hamsters tend to be healthy animals. Bad smelling diarrhea is one sign of a serious problem. Veterinary Pet Insurance ([www.petinsurance.com](http://www.petinsurance.com)) now offers health insurance policies for hamsters.

## Special needs

Hamsters need more time than most small pets to socialize to people. Syrian hamsters are very nocturnal and do not like to be disturbed during the day. Very cold temperatures can cause a hamster to hibernate, which can cause it to appear dead.

## Life cycle

Syrian hamsters live an average of 2-2 1/2 years, although it's possible for them to live 5 years. Hamsters can breed as early as 3 weeks of age but should not until 4 months. The gestation period is 16 days and the average litter size is 6-8. Baby hamsters open their eyes at 18 days and can be weaned at 3-4 weeks.

Dwarf Russian hamsters live an average of 1-1 1/2 years, although it's possible for them to live 3 years. They can breed as early as 4-5 weeks of age but should not until 2-3 months. The gestation period is 18-21 days and the average litter size is 5-6. The babies open their eyes at 12 days and can be weaned at 3 weeks.

## Expert Help

If you have questions about your hamster, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a hamster care book for more complete information. You, your veterinarian, and the staff here at the store will form the team, which will be responsible for your hamster's well being.

## Supplies Checklist

Cage	Treats
Bedding and/or litter	Litter box (optional)
Water bottle	Bed
Moist-food dish	Exercise wheel
Dry food dispenser	Activity toys
Hamster food	Chew toys

