



Glenway Animal Hospital
6272 Glenway Avenue
Cincinnati, Ohio 45211
(513) 662-0224
glenwaypetdocs@fuse.net

Frequently Asked Gerbil Questions

Congratulations on the arrival of your new gerbil! The doctors and staff of Glenway Animal Hospital are committed to making sure that your newest family member lives a long, happy, and healthy life. To help you and your gerbil to start out on the right foot (and paw 😊) we've put together a list of some frequently asked questions and their corresponding answers. This list is not all-inclusive so if you have additional questions please don't hesitate to contact us!

What are the most common types of pet gerbil?

The most common types of pet gerbil are Mongolian gerbils.

What should I feed my gerbil?

Good quality food and fresh, clean water must be readily available at all times. You need to choose a fortified diet appropriate for gerbils. You should fill the bowl approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Gerbils require a high fiber diet for digestive motility. Our favorite food brand is Oxbow's Healthy Handfuls.

Gerbils should be offered one teaspoon of fresh fruit and vegetables (apples or carrots) twice weekly. Don't overfeed these fresh foods, they contain a lot of moisture and too much can cause an upset stomach. Other "treat" foods include sugarless breakfast cereals, whole wheat breads, uncooked pasta and cooked lean meats. Remember to remove any uneaten vegetables or fruit after 4 hours to prevent spoiling. Hard crunchy treats keep your gerbil's front teeth trimmed.

All food should be offered in a heavy ceramic crock that won't tip over. The sides of the bowl need to be high enough so bedding or feces won't get into the bowl and

low enough so the gerbil can easily access the food. Water is commonly offered using a water bottle equipped with a 'sipper' tube. It is important that all food and water containers be cleaned and disinfected daily.

Where should I house my gerbil?

Appropriate housing is critical in maintaining a healthy pet. Select a location away from direct sunlight, with good ventilation, and avoid damp areas. Drastic environmental changes need to be avoided. Most gerbils are nocturnal, they are most active at night. However in captivity, gerbils have cycles of activity and rest in both day and night with peak activity occurring during the middle of the night.

Gerbils can be housed within enclosures made of durable plastic that is at least 6 inches tall. Wood cages should be avoided because they are difficult to clean and sanitize and are susceptible to destructive chewing. At least one side of the cage should be open; therefore aquariums are not suitable. Examine cages for potential hazards, escape routes, or sharp edges every time you clean. Gerbils need enough floor space per adult gerbil allowing for normal play and activity. As with other living arrangements, the more space the better for your gerbil's quality of life.

Solid cage floors are required. They may require a bit more effort to keep clean, but are better for your gerbil's health.

Gerbils are active burrowers and construct intricate tunnel systems with chambers for nesting and for food storage. Many versions of hideaway huts are available commercially, but a cardboard box works well too, is inexpensive and doubles as a chew toy. Other chew toys such as non-toxic twigs and branches, and untreated wood can be rotated for their continued chewing pleasure and dental health.

What type of bedding should I use for my gerbil?

Bedding materials must be clean, nontoxic, absorbent, relatively dust free, and easy to replace. Acceptable bedding includes wood shavings, shredded paper, news paper or commercial pellets (examples are Carefresh, Ecostraw or Yesterdays News). **DO NOT** use cedar shavings, as they are often implicated in causing respiratory and liver disease. Saw dust can also cause problems and should not be used. The cage should have 2 to 3 inches of bedding in it to allow the gerbil to burrow. Soft paper tissues also provide bedding for them to use to make a nest. The cage should be changed at least once a week.

How should I handle my gerbil?

Gerbils are curious and not easily startled, so they are great for busy, active households. Most gerbils will allow you to scoop them into the palm of your hand directly from their cage. Never pick your gerbil up by the tail. When carrying a gerbil, hold him/her close to your body with your hands cupped around them. When removing your gerbil use caution because if a gerbil escapes it usually will not return to its cage. Gerbils can live for many months hiding in your home.

When should my gerbil see a veterinarian?

Your gerbil should have a full physical examination by a veterinarian familiar with this species at least every six months to detect subtle problems such as malocclusion, skin, eye, and ear abnormalities, or change in weight. A fecal specimen should be checked as well to detect for intestinal parasites. Your gerbil should be taken to your veterinarian if you notice any changes in behavior, bathroom habits (diarrhea), anorexia (decreased appetite), abnormal swelling, abnormal discharge, ruffed fur, inactivity, hair loss or limping. As prey animals they will often hide disease states until they are quite ill, so it is important to know what is normal for your gerbil so you can detect abnormalities and have them treated quickly.

Does my gerbil need a friend?

Gerbils are gentle and social. They enjoy the companionship of another gerbil (house only same gender pairs who were raised together). Gerbils also enjoy human interactions. Bonded pairs or family units of gerbils are usually affectionate with each other. They will play, chasing each other around, wrestling and boxing. They also groom each other, sleep in piles and cuddle together. However gerbils will fight, this may be difficult to distinguish between playing. You will sometimes hear them make a loud high-pitched squeak when fighting. If they begin to fight they need to be separated immediately; as gerbils sometimes fight to the death. It is difficult if not impossible to introduce a new gerbil so it is best to keep a group of similarly aged gerbils that are raised together from a young age. You must decide if you have the room and financial means to properly care for your pet before you take the plunge.

What should I do in case of emergency?

Glenway Animal Hospital is open 7 am to 6 pm every weekday and from 8 am to 12 noon on select Saturdays. During those hours if Dr. Dornbusch Cron or Dr. Naas are not on duty the staff can refer you to other area practices that see gerbils. For after hour care see our emergency options handout. Emergency situations include refusal to eat or drink (this can become very serious quickly), bleeding,

difficulty breathing, sudden or abnormal swelling (anywhere), abdominal distension, any sign of acute pain or distress (vocalization, hunching, straining to urinate or defecate, etc).

How long can I expect my gerbil to live?

The average lifespan of a gerbil is 3-4 years. There is a lot of individual as well as breed variation, but a good quality diet and preventative medicine and care can help your gerbil live its life to the fullest potential.

For more information:

www.oxbowhay.com Premium hay, pellets, treats & supplements, information
www.veterinarypartner.com a website run by veterinarians

Fun gerbil facts

Gerbils are native to desert regions of Mongolia and northeastern China.

All of the Mongolian gerbils available today are derived from 20 pairs captured in 1935.

Male gerbils weigh around 65-100 grams and females weigh 55 to 85 grams.

Spontaneous seizures occur in approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of pet gerbils. The seizure may be induced by sudden noise or handling.

When gerbils are excited or stressed they will thump as a warning sign to other gerbils. They pound both hind legs on the ground. If one begins to thump other gerbils will also begin thumping. The loudness and tempo of the thumping varies with the urgency or meaning of the thump. So if there is a rhythmic thumping and clicking noise the gerbil may join in.

Gerbils sleeping position vary with the temperature. If the temperature is above 86° F they tend to sleep on their backs with their legs in the air. If the temperature is 77 °F they lie on their side. If the temperature is below 77 ° F they will sleep with their head tucked between their rear legs.

Father gerbils will help take care of the babies.

Gerbils are the least smelly domesticated rodent. Gerbils also don't sweat.

Gerbils have excellent hearing.

