



Glenway Animal Hospital
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Frequently Asked Hamster Questions

Congratulations on the arrival of your new hamster! 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 hamster 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 hamster?

The most common types of pet hamsters are: Syrian, Golden, Robo, Siberian, Chinese and Russian.

What should I feed my hamster?

Good quality food and fresh, clean water must be readily available at all times. Hamsters eat 12 grams (about 1 tablespoon) of food daily mostly at night. Be observant of your hamster food intake they often hoard food in a corner. Carefully select commercial pellets that contain 15-20% protein. **DO NOT** feed your hamster rabbit pellets or pellet mixtures that contain corn, nuts, seeds or colored "poofies". These can lead to obesity and nutritional deprivation. Hamsters require a high fiber diet for digestive motility. Our favorite food brand is Oxbow's Healthy Handfuls.

Hamster should be offered one teaspoon of fresh vegetables (mustard greens, kale, collard greens, and carrots) daily and one teaspoon of fresh fruit twice weekly. Other "treat" foods include sugarless breakfast cereals, whole wheat breads, pasta and cooked lean meats. Care should be taken not to overfeed fresh foods because

they have a high moisture content and can cause an upset stomach. Remember to remove any uneaten vegetables or fruit after 4 hours to prevent spoiling.

Fresh hay can be given daily. This promotes foraging behaviors and stimulation. Hay can also add fiber to your hamster's diet. Offer your hamster a selection of grass hay including: timothy, oat, orchard grass, or brome hay. Alfalfa is a legume hay which contains higher protein and calcium levels than its grass hay equivalents. Hay also maintains proper tooth wear, preventing malocclusion problems.

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 hamster 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 hamster?

Appropriate housing is critical in maintaining a healthy pet. Hamsters are more comfortable and relaxed when housed in a quiet spot away from noise, excitement, and other stresses. Select a location away from direct sunlight, with good ventilation, and avoid damp areas. Drastic environmental changes need to be avoided. Hamsters are nocturnal, they are most active night.

Hamsters can be housed within enclosures made of durable plastic. 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. Hamsters need enough floor space per adult hamster allowing for normal play and activity. As with other living arrangements the more space the better for your Hamster's quality of life. Hamsters have a reputation for being territorial. Territorial fighting may be reduced by being housed together from weaning to sexual maturity.

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

Hamsters enjoy having a dark, quiet place to rest. 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 hamster?

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.

How should I handle my hamster?

Hamsters have a reputation of being fractious although they are normally easy to work with unless handled roughly or suddenly disturbed. Hamsters will bite if handled roughly or startled. Most hamsters will allow you to scoop them into the palm of your hand directly from their cage; some may wish to exit by themselves via a ramp or tunnel. When carrying a hamster, hold him/her close to your body with your hands cupped around them. When removing your hamster use caution because if a hamster escapes it usually will not return to its cage. Hamsters can live for many months hiding in your home.

When should my hamster see a veterinarian?

Your hamster 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 hamster should be taken to your veterinarian if you notice any changes in behavior (diarrhea), bathroom habits, anorexia, 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 hamster so you can detect abnormalities and treat them quickly.

Does my hamster need a friend?

Because they are territorial creatures, Hamsters usually enjoy living alone. Hamsters enjoy human interactions but not the company of other hamsters. 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 hamsters.

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 hamster to live?

The average lifespan of a hamster is 18-24 months. There is a lot of individual as well as breed variation, but a good quality diet and preventative medicine and care can help your hamster 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 hamster facts

Hamsters are heavy sleepers and may be difficult to awaken.

Male hamsters weigh around 85-130 grams and females weigh 95 to 150 grams.

Although not true hibernators, with shortened days and temperature below 48 F hamsters gather food and pseudohibernate.

If a nursing female hamster is disturbed she may hide her litter in her cheek pouches.