

# Petware House

## Your Neighborhood Pet Store

### Hamster

Mesocricetus auratus

### CARE SHEET



Short-haired, long-haired and European hamsters are clean and captivating companion animals that are best kept alone. Hamsters are known as hoarders, because they have cheek pouches that are used to store and move food from one place to another.

**Average Size** The average size of a Hamster is 4 to 5 inches in length. **Life span** 2-3 years of age.

**Feeding** Fresh food and water should always be available. Small amounts of grains, vegetables, fruits or timothy hay can be given daily. Vegetable and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be thrown away.

High quality hamster food containing a minimum of 16% protein and 4% fat and a maximum of 4-6% fiber. Treats should not exceed 10% of total food intake. Do not feed chocolate, alcohol or caffeine; these are dangerous. Clean, fresh, de-chlorinated, filtered water changed daily. Animals on premium foods do not need additional vitamin supplements.

**Housing** Hamsters acclimate well to average household temperatures; be cautious of extreme temperature change; habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area. Habitat should be glass, plastic or metal, escape proof and with a solid bottom.

There should be plenty of room for the hamster to exercise and play; it is best to provide the largest habitat possible. 1-2 inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes hardwood shavings and pelleted or recycled products; cedar bedding may cause harm and is not recommended.

House adult hamsters separately.

**Maintenance** Remove wet spots daily; change bedding weekly as needed and wash all items in the habitat. Clean the habitat once a week by scrubbing it with mild soap and water, rinse and allow to completely dry to minimize fumes before placing hamster back into the habitat.

**Temps** Stable room temperature is adequate. No special requirements.

**Humidity** No special requirements

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**Lighting**            Hamsters are nocturnal, keep out of direct sunlight. Use room lighting as needed.

## **WATER & ACCESSORIES**

Hamsters should be given a sipper bottle, hung from the side of the cage. They also need small toys to play with and a running wheel for exercise. Keep a food bowl; chew stick and nesting house as well.

## **BASIC REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION**

The sex of adult hamsters is easy to determine. Male have very large, prominent testicles. In fact, owners unaccustomed to seeing them are often astonished at the anatomic peculiarities.

Male golden hamsters should be first bred when they are 14 weeks old. Females should be first bred when they are 10 weeks old. As the time of copulation approaches, thin, stringy, cobweb-like mucus exits the female's vulva. The female is then placed into the male's cage about one hour before dark. The pair must then be carefully observed for mating activity and/or fighting. Females can be very aggressive to males in this situation and can harm them. The male should be removed at once if there is fighting. Because fighting is so likely, aggressive males are best hand-mated. In these situations, they are better able to defend themselves and "hold their ground". The male should be removed after mating.

Pregnancy lasts only 15 1/2-16 days. Before delivery, the female becomes restless and usually discharges a small amount of blood from her vulva. Litters usually range from 5 to 10 pups. The pups are born hairless, with ears and eyes closed. They do, however, have their front teeth (the incisors) at birth.

Female hamsters with young must be provided with abundant nesting and bedding materials, and plenty of food and water. They must not be disturbed in any way. The young should not be touched or handled until they are at least 7 days old, the nest should not be disturbed, and the cage should not be cleaned during this period. Failure to heed these cautions (especially with females nursing their first litters) most often results in cannibalism of the young.

Observant owners may note an interesting maternal rearing activity, especially if the female with young is excited or disturbed. She will stuff pups into her cheek pouches and deposit them into the nest a short time later when she believes the danger has passed. Occasionally, pups suffocate as a result of this activity, especially during lengthy period of disturbance.

Young hamsters usually begin eating solid food at 10 days of age but are usually weaned at about 3 weeks of age. Solid, pelleted food must be soaked to soften it and be placed on or near floor level of the enclosure for easy access by the weanlings. As mentioned above, sipper tubes must be positioned low enough so that the smallest pups can reach them. Some pups will not be strong enough to extract water from sipper tubes, so owners must be vigilant for this potential problem and provide an alternative water source for them.

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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

Hamsters are active during the night and sleep during the day (nocturnal). They are easy to handle once trust is established between you and your hamsters; they may become irritable and nip if suddenly awakened from a nap or startled.

Hamsters chew on objects to maintain the incisor teeth, which grow continuously. Use cheek pouches to transfer food from one location to another.

They are solitary; never house more than one adult hamster per habitat.

### **Grooming:**

Hamsters stay clean and do not need baths. A teddy bear hamster's fur needs to be combed regularly with a soft brush; other hamsters may be combed as necessary.