

Common Illnesses

Dental Problems – As all rodents, gerbils teeth continue to grow throughout their life. Should your gerbil be injured and a tooth become misaligned, the opposite tooth will grow as it has nothing opposing it on which to grind. Gerbils require fibre in their diet and gnawing ensures their teeth are evenly worn, preventing overgrowth. Overgrown teeth can cause a number of problems including abscesses and inability to eat.

Diarrhoea – Overfeeding with green food is a common cause of diarrhoea. You should stop feeding green food immediately if your gerbil has diarrhoea, allow it only to eat its gerbil mix. Take your gerbil to the vet immediately as loss of fluid through diarrhoea can be life threatening.

Colds – Gerbils can catch colds from humans so, if you have a cold, you should keep the handling of your gerbil and its food to the minimum. Your gerbil will have a runny nose and sneeze if he has a cold and should be kept in a warm room. Isolate the affected gerbil from the rest of the group as colds can spread through colonies. Take him to the vet if the condition has not cleared in two to three days, or if you have any concerns at all.

Tyzers Disease – This is a very serious condition and your gerbil will have diarrhoea, look tired and weak and will lose his appetite. Take your gerbil to the vet immediately if your gerbil has these symptoms, as this disease is often fatal.

Good hygiene in the gerbilarium and using good quality bedding and burrowing material will help prevent this disease.

Always consult a vet if you have ANY reason for concern.

Gerbil Profile

Latin Name:	<i>Meriones unguiculatus</i>
Female:	Sow
Male:	Boar
Young:	Pups
Life span:	3-5 years
Litter Size:	3-10 pups
Birth weight:	1-3gms
Eyes open:	17 days
Gestation period:	24-26 days
Average weight:	Male 60gms Female 50gms
Sexual maturity:	Male 10-12 weeks Female 10-12 weeks
Weaning age:	21-24 days
Diet:	Omnivorous



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If you would like any more information on Gerri Gerbil or any other products in the Supreme range, please contact us:

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Gerri's Guide to Gerbils



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Introduction

This leaflet includes information on how to care for your gerbil including feeding, housing, and common illnesses.

Gerbils are friendly and inquisitive animals and deserve consideration and commitment when being looked after as a pet.

History of Gerbils

In the wild, Mongolian gerbils live in the desert where there is little vegetation, low rainfall and temperatures that fluctuate enormously between Summer and Winter, and day and night.

The survival of gerbils is down to their burrowing instincts. Burrowing allows them to protect themselves from the extremes in temperature as, under the soil, temperatures remain constant.

Gerbil burrows in the wild are a complex network of tunnels, with nests and food storage chambers which allow the gerbil to stay underground for long periods of time.

The gerbil species has evolved to need only limited food and water. Their long hind legs allow them to cover large distances in a harsh habitat in order to collect food. In addition, their bodies require little water as they do not sweat and they re-absorb their liquid intake producing highly concentrated urine and dry faeces.

The Latin name for gerbils is "*Meriones unguiculatus*" which means "clawed warrior".



Colours/Patterns/Markings

Gerbils have only been domesticated for the last 30 years so there has not yet been an opportunity for extensive development of coloured varieties.

The Golden Agouti is the most common gerbil found in pet shops and is a sandy colour with a dark stripe down the spine and tail. Other varieties include Albino, Black, Cinnamon, White Spot, Dark Tailed White, Dove and Argente



Nutritional Requirements

In their natural habitat gerbils eat a selection of wind blown seeds, grain and grasses. Gerbils are often mistaken as herbivores, but they are omnivores and do need a small amount of protein in their diet to keep them healthy. In the wild they would satisfy this need by eating grubs and insects.

They also have continuously-growing teeth so need to gnaw to help wear down their teeth.

Gerbils have traditionally been fed on hamster mixes. However, this is not ideal as their requirements are different and hamster mixes contain too much fat for a gerbil. A coarse mix, such as **Gerri Gerbil** provides everything your gerbil needs including vitamins and minerals and comes in one handy bag.

Feeding Your Gerbil

Gerri Gerbil

Gerri Gerbil is a complete diet specially formulated for gerbils. It is a mix of ingredients, including alfalfa, maize, wheat, naked oats, carrots, peas, raisins and pumpkin seeds, as well as soya to provide just the right amount of protein in your gerbil's diet, whilst remaining low in fat. **Gerri Gerbil** does not contain any sunflower seeds as, although gerbils love them, too many can be bad for them. However, the variety of ingredients included encourages foraging which is natural for gerbils and helps prevent them from becoming bored.



Changing your gerbil's diet

If you are not feeding **Gerri Gerbil** food at present but would like to try it, you must introduce it gradually into your gerbil's diet. Mix about one quarter of the new food with three quarters of the old food on the first day and then gradually increase the new food and decrease the old food over a 10-day period. This should make sure that your gerbil has no tummy upsets.



Root 'n' Fruit Treats

A really delicious treat bar bursting with fruit flavours that your gerbil will love, including plump raisins, crispy carrot and tasty apple. Filled with natural goodness to provide loads of energy. Only give them a small piece at a time.

Selective feeding

Gerbils need feeding every day. A good quality, heavy, earthenware food bowl is essential to keep the food dry and clean, and prevent the gerbil from tipping the food on to the floor of the cage. Feeding bowls must be cleaned after every use.

Ensure there is fresh drinking water available at all times.

Looking After Your Gerbil

Housing

In the wild gerbils live in burrows and spend the majority of time foraging for food, so you need to provide plenty of room for your gerbil to eat, sleep and run around. Gerbils should be kept in pairs or groups and you must make sure that there is room for all of them. They need to be kept indoors and careful thought must be given to where your gerbils' cage will be kept. The temperature in the room should be constant, away from direct sunlight and draughts, and out of reach of any other pets.

Gerbils need good, secure, roomy housing. They can be kept in a wire cage with a plastic base or a plastic hamster home but the best option is to construct a "gerbilarium" (an aquarium with a well ventilated cover). Never keep them in a wooden hutch as they will gnaw their way out.

A good cage will be two tiered and have at least two compartments – one for the day and one to nest and hide in at night. Don't forget that if you have more than one gerbil you will need a bigger cage. They prefer to sleep separately at night, too, so need their own nesting areas.

Cage Hygiene

Cleaning Spray

Keep It Clean is a cage and hutch cleaner that eliminates pet odours, germs and bacteria (which can harm your pet). **Keep It Clean** can be sprayed on the bedding as well as inside the cage or hutch ensuring that your pet's home is truly clean at all times.

Bedding Material

Russel Bedding is made from the highest quality barley straw, chopped for extra comfort. It fluffs up to provide a natural, warm bedding that is ideal for your gerbil. Because it is completely natural, **Russel Bedding** is safer than some other types of bedding. It is also treated with a non-toxic cleaning agent to eliminate pet odours, germs and bacteria.

Supreme Choice Woodshavings

A high quality, fresh bedding which is highly absorbent and dust extracted. Available in a compressed pack and is good value for money.

Supreme Science – Carefresh

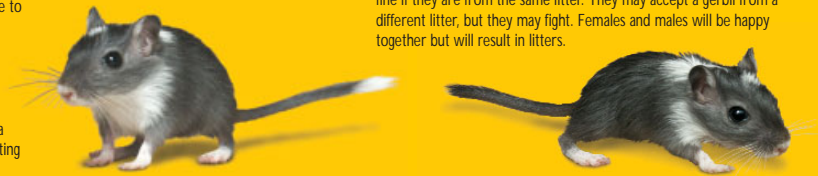
Alternatively there is **Supreme Science – Carefresh**, which is even more absorbent than traditional bedding and eliminates pet odours. It is dust free and hypo-allergenic and is, therefore, particularly suitable if your gerbil has any sort of allergy or respiratory illness. It is safe and hygienic and has been heat treated to inhibit bacteria and fungi growth.

Dust Bath

Gerbils love to have a dust bath. Place a high quality sand, such as **Charlie Chinchilla Bathing Sand**, into a box or bowl, and let your gerbils roll around and flip over. They will thoroughly enjoy themselves and the sand will help to keep their coats healthy by removing excess oils.

Exercise

Gerbils are naturally very active and inquisitive animals. They like to keep themselves busy and, when allowed, spend the majority of their time running around and investigating their surroundings. It only takes a few items to create an exciting playground for your pet.



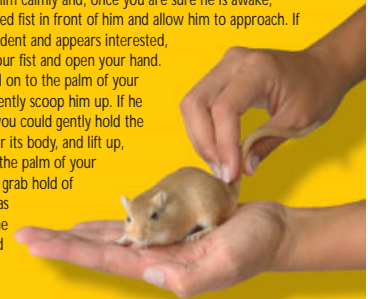
Gerbils explore around the edge and hiding places first, rather than the middle of the area or run. Place objects like tubes, tunnels, untreated wicker baskets and boxes in the run for them to play with.

Piles of twigs (natural wood – willow, beech or apple) make platforms for them to explore or rest under. Gerbils will chew the wood and this will help keep their teeth in trim.

By hiding food and the occasional treat in different areas of the animals' cage, your gerbils will be forced to hunt for their food – this will keep them occupied for many happy hours and prevent boredom. Check out the **'Furry Fun'** accessories range from Supreme Petfoods.

Handling Your Gerbil

Always approach him calmly and, once you are sure he is awake, slowly place a closed fist in front of him and allow him to approach. If your gerbil is confident and appears interested, slowly unclench your fist and open your hand. He may well crawl on to the palm of your hand or you can gently scoop him up. If he appears hesitant, you could gently hold the base of its tail, near its body, and lift up, placing its feet on the palm of your other hand (never grab hold of the end of his tail as gerbils can shed the skin to escape, and will be frightened next time you approach him).



Companionship

Gerbils in the wild live in large colonies. They are sociable animals and can be truly unhappy if kept in solitude. There should be no problems keeping gerbils together if the following rules are followed.

Firstly, as we said before, you must have a cage which is large enough to accommodate more than one gerbil. It is best to acquire littermates in order to avoid fighting. Pairs or groups of males or females will be fine if they are from the same litter. They may accept a gerbil from a different litter, but they may fight. Females and males will be happy together but will result in litters.