

Companionship

Dwarf hamsters in the wild live in large colonies with a well-structured hierarchy and are happy in a pair or a group. Syrian or Golden Hamsters are solitary and must be kept alone.

If you are intending to have more than one hamster, you must have a cage which is large enough. It is best to acquire littermates in order to avoid fighting. Female pairs or groups will be fine. Males will live happily together but may become agitated if in the vicinity of females. Females and males will be happy together but will result in litters. You should never breed from related individuals.

Common Illnesses

Hamsters do not often become ill but, because of their size, they can deteriorate very quickly if they do become ill.

Diarrhoea – overfeeding with green food is a common cause of diarrhoea. You should stop feeding green food immediately if your hamster has diarrhoea and allow it only to eat its hamster mix. If the diarrhoea persists, your hamster should be taken to the vet.

Constipation – conversely, if there is a lack of droppings in the cage and your hamster has a hunched appearance, it may have constipation. Feeding with a small amount of green vegetables may relieve your hamster, but if there is no improvement it should be taken to the vet.

Wet Tail – is often confused with diarrhoea, but is a bacterial infection that can cause extreme diarrhoea, with a distinctive smell. The anus and tail area of the hamster appear wet and sticky. The hamster may appear hunched up as it is in pain. Hamsters with Wet Tail should be isolated from other hamsters as it is highly infectious. You must wash your hands thoroughly before you handle any other hamster. Seek veterinary treatment immediately.

Overgrown Teeth – as hamsters' teeth continue to grow throughout their life, hamsters need to be provided with hard material to gnaw. Special wood gnaws can be purchased from pet shops to encourage gnawing, or feed **Harry Hamster Yippee Treats**. If there is a chipped tooth, or their teeth do not meet properly, this may cause overgrowth and pain, and your hamster will find it difficult to eat.

Overgrown Nails – nails can also become overgrown and should be trimmed by a vet to ensure your hamster is comfortable.

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

Hamster Profile

Latin Name:	<i>Mesocricetus auratus</i>
Female:	Sow
Male:	Boar
Young:	Pups
Life span:	1-3 years
Litter Size:	4-12 pups
Birth weight:	2-3gms
Eyes open:	12-14 days
Gestation period:	15-18 days
Average weight:	Male 85-130gms Female 95-150gms
Sexual maturity:	Male 6-8 weeks Female 4 weeks
Weaning age:	3 weeks
Diet:	Omnivorous

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


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Harry's Guide to Hamsters




Supreme

Introduction

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

Hamsters are very clever and adventurous animals and deserve consideration and commitment when being looked after as a pet.

History of Hamsters

Hamsters belong to the rodent family. The name "hamster" is derived from the German word "hamstern" which means "to hoard". Wild hamsters live in hot areas of Central Asia. To avoid the heat of the day hamsters live in burrows and are nocturnal.

In the cool of the evening and during the night hamsters will search for food - and can travel up to 8 miles in one night. They collect food in their cheek pouches and return to their burrows and empty the cheek pouches into their food store. They are able to carry up to half their body weight in their pouches.

Hamsters have the latin name *Mesocricetus auratus* which means "golden hair".



Colours/Patterns/Markings

There are over 20 different breeds of hamsters, each with their own individual markings and colours.

The Dwarf Hamsters (Russian, Chinese and Roborovski) are smaller in stature, are very sociable, and will enjoy being kept in pairs or in groups (remember to keep them in single sex pairs or groups if you don't want to breed from them).

Russian Hamsters are mainly white, grey and brown in colour, and the Roborovski Hamster is always brown. The Chinese Hamster has a greyish brown coat, with a dark stripe down it's back.



Cream



Satin Silver Grey

Nutritional Requirements

In their natural habitat hamsters eat a range of grasses, wind-blown seeds and grain. Hamsters are often mistaken as herbivores, but they are omnivores and need high amounts of protein in their diet to keep them healthy. Left alone in the wild, they will find grubs and insects to supplement their diet. The bulk of their diet is cereals and other hard foods which are chewed and digested slowly. This slow eating would make them easy targets in the wild, so they would normally bring their food back to their burrow to eat it in the safety of their own home. This also allows them to hoard spare food, in case it becomes difficult to find food at a later date.

Feeding Your Hamster

Harry Hamster

The first food ever approved by the National Hamster Council, **Harry Hamster** is a coarse mix and contains all the nutrients and goodness that your hamster requires to keep fit and healthy. **Harry Hamster** is a mix of ingredients including alfalfa, maize, wheat, naked oats, beans, peas and sunflower seeds, as well as soya extrusions and pellets to provide just the right amount of protein in your hamster's diet. This variety of ingredients encourages foraging – a natural behaviour in hamsters.



Hamsters need feeding every day. As they are nocturnal, an evening feed is better for them. They will normally wake at feeding time and will be happy to play with you once they have been fed. A good quality, heavy, earthenware food bowl is essential to keep the food dry and clean. Plastic should be avoided as hamsters will chew it. Their bowls must be cleaned after every use.

Harry Hamster Yippee Treats

A tasty mix of crunchy sticks, bursting with the flavours of carrot, apple and maize that hamsters love! Hide one or two around the cage to encourage your hamster to forage. If you have a Dwarf Hamster, break the stick in half before you give it to him.



Changing your hamster's diet

If you are not feeding **Harry Hamster** food at present but would like to try it, you must introduce it gradually into your hamster'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 hamster has no tummy upsets.

Selective feeding

You should try to ensure that your hamster eats all his food from a very young age by calculating the correct daily requirement and feeding in the evening. However, if you notice that your hamster tends to leave some of the ingredients in coarse mixes, reduce the amount you give him until he is eating all of it. Then slowly increase the amount again to the recommended daily allowance.

Ensure there is fresh drinking water available at all times.

Looking After Your Hamster

Housing

Hamsters can be housed in a wire cage with a plastic base, a plastic hamster home or an adapted aquarium (vivarium) with a well-ventilated cover. Wooden cages should not be used as hamsters can chew their way out! The most important thing to remember is that a hamster home can never be too big – they love to explore and exercise. Multi-level cages are a good idea as they add interest to the hamster's environment – but be careful with plastic tubes as the larger Syrian hamsters may get stuck. The hamster home must always have a place for your hamster to rest and hide, and another area for play, exercise and feeding.



Hamsters must always be kept indoors and careful thought should be given to where your hamster's home is situated. The temperature in the room should be constant, away from direct sunlight and draughts, and away from constant noise (ie: a freezer). Because they have sensitive hearing they should never be placed near a television, CD player, Hi-Fi, etc.

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

Keeping your hamster warm and cosy is very important. You need bedding that is absorbent which makes cleaning easier for you. Do not use bedding that is synthetic as this could harm your hamster if he ate it and might block his cheek pouches, food pipe or gut.

Russel Bedding

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 hamster. 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, and has been specially processed to ensure it is completely free from dust (many animals are allergic to dust).

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

Supreme Science – Carefresh 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 hamster has any sort of allergy. It is safe and hygienic and has been heat treated to inhibit bacteria and fungi growth.

Exercise

It is extremely important that your hamster has the opportunity to exercise every day.

If you provide a wheel for your hamster to play in, it **MUST** be big enough so that the hamster does not have to bend his back when he is inside, and must have a solid floor rather than rungs as these can cause injuries to the feet and tail. Although hamsters sleep during the day, they are really energetic and will exercise for 3-4 hours a night.

A hamster's natural instinct is to forage and explore. Mealtime is always over too quickly and this could mean that your hamster will get bored. It only takes a few items to create an exciting environment for him to be in.

Place objects like tubes, tunnels and small cardboard boxes in the cage for him to play with. Place twigs of willow, beech or hazel in the cage for him to climb and gnaw on. By hiding food and the occasional treat in different areas of the animal's cage, your hamster will be forced to hunt for his food – this will keep him occupied for many happy hours and prevent boredom. Check out the **'Furry Fun'** accessories range from Supreme Petfoods.

Handling Your Hamster

Before attempting handling, make sure that your hamster is fully awake and alert. Try not to wake your hamster suddenly if he is asleep.

Always approach him slowly and gently. Place a closed fist in front of your pet, and allow him to approach and sniff you. Hamsters rely on olfactory cues (smells) rather than sound and, therefore, smell is important so they can detect what is approaching. If your hamster is confident and appears interested, slowly unclench your fist and offer your palm. He may well crawl on to your hand or you can gently scoop him up. Cup him in the palms of your two hands to ensure that he is safe and won't be dropped. Lift him up slowly, as picking him up too quickly would be the equivalent of going up the Empire State Building in 3 seconds! To ensure he is safe at all times you should hold him over your lap or close to your chest.

Never scruff a hamster to pick him up, as this can put immense pressure on the head region possibly resulting in a prolapsed eye.

