

To ensure the gerbil is healthy and not experiencing pain, daily visual health checks should be carried out.

Eyes

- ✓ Open and close freely
- ✓ Clear, bright
- ✗ Discharge
- ✗ Unable to open & close freely
- ✗ Cloudy

Nose

- ✓ Dry
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Sneezing or wheezing

Mouth

- ✓ Eating well
- ✓ Aligned teeth
- ✓ Pink gums
- ✗ Dropping food/dribbling
- ✗ Reluctant to eat
- ✗ Overgrown teeth
- ✗ Pale gums



Legs, feet, claws

- ✓ Move freely
- ✓ Nails not curled over
- ✗ Overgrown claws
- ✗ Reluctant to move/ weight bear

Body/Skin

- ✓ Smooth, glossy coat
- ✓ Complete coat
- ✗ Dull coat
- ✗ Bald patches
- ✗ Red/broken skin
- ✗ Scratching

Anogenital area

- ✓ Clean and clear
- ✓ Evidence of regular faeces production
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Sticky faeces/ matted fur
- ✗ Smelly
- ✗ Swelling



Looking after your Gerbil

Facts

Gerbils are social and should be kept in same sex pairs

Gerbils are nocturnal, so will be most active during the night

Gerbils like to burrow and should be kept in tanks with lots of suitable substrate

Popular pet species include the Mongolian gerbil and the fat-tailed gerbil

To ensure all pet animals are well cared for, the Animal Welfare Act 2006 was introduced.

This law states that all animal owners have a legal duty of care to meet their animal's five welfare needs.

The five welfare needs are:

- The need for a suitable environment
- The need for a suitable diet
- The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns
- The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals
- The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.



Pet Industry Federation
www.petfederation.co.uk
Company registration no. 7252816



www.mypetpeople.co.uk is the website directory of PIF member businesses for pet owners looking for outstanding services for their pet

The need for a suitable environment

It is important to provide the gerbil with safe, suitable accommodation which is clean, comfortable, secure and has appropriate environmental conditions, including temperature, ventilation and drainage.

A well ventilated tank with a secure lid is ideal for gerbils, as they will kick the substrate out of cages. The accommodation should be out of direct sunlight and free from draughts.

The accommodation should contain a suitable floor covering (substrate) such as dust free wood shavings, chopped straw or peat. Gerbils like to burrow and will create underground tunnels and dens. Nesting material should also be provided in one corner of the accommodation but may be carried to an underground den. Gerbils will also store food.

Fresh water should be constantly available, a water bottle is recommended for this as the water in bowls can become easily contaminated, especially if peat is used. Bottles should be refilled daily and the bottle checked to ensure the ball has not become encrusted with substrate.

Gerbils are susceptible to changes in temperature and the accommodation should be kept constant, between 17°C and 23°C. Sudden drops in temperature can affect the gerbils activity level. If the temperature falls below 5°C the gerbil will become very sleepy and lethargic.

Gerbils are clean animals and will toilet in a particular area of the accommodation. The accommodation should be cleaned out twice a week to prevent the buildup of ammonia and bacteria. Animal safe disinfectants should be used. Stored food should be removed daily to prevent it becoming mouldy.



The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

Gerbils live for approximately two years, depending on the species.

Gerbils are nocturnal so are more active at night so may not be suitable for keeping in a child's bedroom.

Gerbils are active and love to dig and burrow so should be provided with a deep layer of substrate.

The need to be housed with, or apart from, other animals

Gerbils are social animals and should be housed in single sexed pairs or groups to prevent unwanted offspring. As gerbils can breed from three months it is essential youngsters are separated early.

The need to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

By providing a suitable diet and accommodation the gerbil will be less likely to develop some diseases and disorders.

To ensure gerbils do not experience pain when being handled they should be handled correctly. Gerbils should be scooped up and held securely in one hand, gerbils must not be picked up by the tail as this can cause the tail to detach. Gerbils who are fearful or uncomfortable when being handled may bite. Small children should not be encouraged to pick up the gerbil, rather they should be handed the gerbil by an adult.

Should the gerbil become ill providing suitable care and where necessary veterinary treatment is essential. Some common diseases are:

- **Respiratory diseases** – symptoms include coughing, sneezing, and discharge from the eyes and nose.
- **Overgrown teeth** – as gerbil's front incisor teeth grow continually they can become overgrown making eating painful. Overgrown teeth can be trimmed by a veterinary professional.
- **Tyzzer's disease**– this is a contagious bacterial disease. Veterinary treatment is essential as the gerbil will require antibiotics. Symptoms include diarrhoea, discomfort, lethargy, loss of appetite and poor coat condition.

The need for a suitable diet

Like most rodents, gerbils are omnivores and can eat a variety of foods, although the introduction of new foods should be gradual to prevent digestive upset.

A variety of specialist gerbil diets are available which contain seeds, grains, nuts and commercially manufactured biscuits, these have been manufactured to provide gerbils with a nutritionally balanced diet.

Gerbils require approximately a teaspoon of food each day. The diet can also be supplemented by very small amounts fruit or vegetables and the occasional dog biscuit. Gerbils like to store their food so food should be measured to prevent over feeding.

Fresh water must always be available to the gerbil.