

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

#### 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

#### Eyes

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

#### Ears

- ✓ Responds to sound
- ✓ Clear
- ✗ Blood or discharge
- ✗ Smelly
- ✗ Excess wax
- ✗ Visible mites



#### 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



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[www.petfederation.co.uk](http://www.petfederation.co.uk)  
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[www.mypetpeople.co.uk](http://www.mypetpeople.co.uk) is the website directory of PIF member businesses for pet owners looking for outstanding services for their pet

# Looking after your Hamster



## Facts

Syrian hamsters are solitary and should be housed alone

Dwarf hamsters are social and should be kept in same sex pairs

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

Hamsters carry food in their cheek pouches to their nest where it is stored

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.



## The need for a suitable environment

This means providing the hamster with safe, suitable accommodation which is clean, comfortable, secure and has appropriate environmental conditions, including temperature, ventilation and drainage.

A large cage with a deep plastic base is ideal for hamsters. Some species of hamster are very small, so the bars of the cage should be less than 9mm apart to prevent escape.

The cage should contain a suitable floor covering (substrate) such as dust free wood shavings or chopped straw. Nesting material should also be provided in one corner of the cage, as hamsters may eat the bedding make sure it is suitable for use with hamsters.

Fresh water should be constantly available, a water bottle is recommended for this as the water in bowls can become easily contaminated.

Hamsters are susceptible to changes in temperature and the accommodation should be kept constant, between 17°C and 23°C. Sudden drops in temperature and will become very sleepy and lethargic if the temperature drops below 5°C.

Hamsters 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. As hamsters store their food the bedding should be checked daily and food removed.

## The need for a suitable diet

Like most rodents, hamsters 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 hamster diets are available containing seeds, grains, nuts and commercially manufactured biscuits. These have been manufactured to provide hamsters with a nutritionally balanced diet.

Hamsters require no more than a teaspoon of food each day. The diet can also be supplemented by very small amounts fruit or vegetables and the occasional dog biscuit.

As hamsters store their food, carrying it to their nest in cheek pouches it is essential to check their bedding daily to prevent food off which may lead to the hamster becoming ill.

Fresh water must always be available to the hamster.



## The need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns

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

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

Providing the hamster with the opportunity to express normal, natural behaviours. Hamsters are naturally active animals and should be provided with enrichment and exercise wheels to prevent obesity and boredom.

Hamsters will often climb the inside of the cage so care must be taken to ensure all doors are securely closed.

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

A hamster's social needs depends on the breed of hamster. Dwarf hamsters such as Russian, Chinese and Roborovski hamsters are social animals and should be kept in same sex pairs to prevent unplanned breeding.

Syrian hamsters are solitary species and must be housed alone, otherwise fighting and even death may occur.

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

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

To ensure hamsters do not experience pain when being handled they should be handled correctly. Hamsters who are fearful or uncomfortable when being handled may bite. Small children should not be encouraged to pick up the hamster, rather they should be handed the hamster by an adult.

Should the hamster become ill providing suitable care and where necessary veterinary treatment is essential. Some common hamster 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.
- **Wet tail**– this is a contagious and fatal disease. Veterinary treatment is essential. Symptoms include diarrhoea (causing a wet tail), lethargy, loss of appetite and poor coat condition.