GERBIL CARE GUIDE

A Quick Reference for Families

Gerbils & Families

- Gerbils are active, curious, agile, and can be difficult to hold.
- Supervise children and use gentle handling.
- Scoop a gerbil with both hands and hold it close to the ground, over the cage, or over your lap.

✕ **Never lift** a gerbil by the tail.

Diet Essentials

- Feed pellets formulated for gerbils; MSD specifies 18–20% protein.
- MSD guidance lists 5 g of pellets per gerbil daily to help prevent obesity and diabetes.
- Keep fresh, clean water available always.
- Small amounts of washed vegetables and limited fruit may supplement the pelleted diet.

Housing & Companionship

- Use a secure enclosure with a solid, non-mesh bottom and a breathable mesh lid.
- MSD guidance uses about 5 gallons of enclosure space per gerbil.
- Keep living quarters at 60–70°F and below 50% humidity.
- Gerbils are **social** and generally do best with other gerbils.
- Do not place an unfamiliar gerbil directly into an established gerbil's territory because fighting may occur.

✕ Foods to Limit or Avoid

✕ **Do not feed** a strict seed diet.

- Avoid pellet-and-seed mixtures because gerbils may select the seeds and leave the balanced pellets.
- Seed-based diets are high in fat, nutritionally poor, and may contribute to obesity.
- Ask a veterinarian before changing the diet or adding supplements.

Bedding & Cleaning

- Fill about one-third of the enclosure with paper-based bedding for digging and food hoarding.
- Provide plain shredded facial tissue for nesting.

✕ **Avoid** cedar and untreated pine shavings and fibrous commercial nesting material.

- Clean and disinfect the enclosure at least every 2–3 weeks.

Teeth & Routine Care

- Gerbils' incisor teeth grow continuously and require regular chewing and gnawing.
- Provide appropriate chew toys or untreated wood.
- Overgrown teeth can cause appetite and weight loss.
- Arrange an initial examination and routine checkups with a veterinarian experienced in small mammals.

Enrichment & Safety

- Provide opportunities for climbing, burrowing, chewing, and exercise.
- Offer untreated wood, cardboard, or suitable chew toys.
- A small wood, cardboard, or ceramic nest box may be provided.
- Supervise time outside the enclosure and prevent escape.

Warning Signs

- Seek veterinary care for inactivity, a hunched posture, appetite or weight loss, dehydration, eye, ear, or nose discharge, rough or matted fur, or trouble breathing.
- Changes in the color, consistency, odor, or amount of urine or feces also need veterinary attention.
- Monitor condition and behavior daily so changes are noticed early.

FINAL REMINDER

Gerbils need secure social housing, deep paper bedding, balanced pellets, chewing opportunities, gentle handling, and prompt veterinary care.

Veterinary sources: MSD Veterinary Manual: Providing a Home for a Gerbil • MSD Veterinary Manual: Routine Health Care of Gerbils • MSD Veterinary Manual: Special Considerations for Gerbils • MSD Veterinary Manual: Introduction to Gerbils • VCA Animal Hospitals: Owning a Pet Gerbil • VCA Animal Hospitals: Housing Rodents • VCA Animal Hospitals: New Small Mammal Veterinary Visit •

This guide is educational and does not replace advice or examination by a veterinarian.