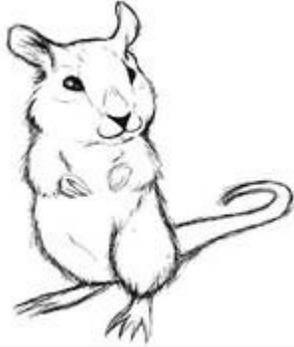


## Gerbils, Mice & Hamsters: General Care & Husbandry



### Diet

- They should be fed seed mixtures that are high in nutrients and offer variety.
- Sunflower seeds are often a favorite, but are high in fat so they should be fed in moderation. You should avoid adding extra sunflower seeds to your pet's seed mixture because they may ignore the other seeds. Better yet, pick out the sunflower seeds and use as a treat to encourage handleability.
- You can add fresh fruit and veggies to your pet's diet but be sure to introduce these slowly, and give only in small amounts to avoid diarrhea (~1 tsp. per day). Remove any uneaten fruits and veggies each day.
- Some good options for fresh fruits and veggies are: carrots, broccoli, apples, berries, and raisins. Be sure all fruits and veggies are washed thoroughly, and don't have any added sugar, salt, etc. Sugary fruits should be limited, otherwise diarrhea will result!
- **FOODS TO AVOID:** cabbages, rhubarb, raw kidney beans, onions, potato leaves, and chocolate/candy. If you are unsure of what you can offer, consult with your veterinarian or a reputable reference book.
- Always provide plenty of fresh water, changed daily.

### Housing/Equipment

- Gerbils and hamsters are natural climbers and can easily escape from their cage so be sure to choose one that has a secure lid. Aquariums (minimum of 10 gallons) with wire mesh tops work well.
- Avoid plastic housing as they may try to chew through it, and ingestion of plastic can be very harmful.
- Cages with solid floors (vs. wire floors) are best to prevent foot sores and injuries.
- Provide lots of material for burrowing and nesting. Shredded paper or commercially-made small animal bedding (such as "Care fresh") make good bedding material.
- **DO NOT USE** Cedar and pine shavings as bedding material because they are aromatic and can cause respiratory problems.
- They like to have an enclosed area in their cage to nest in, so be sure to provide a small hiding area. Ceramic or hard wood materials work best.
- A rodent water bottle is an excellent way to keep water clean and within reach- just be sure to check it daily to be sure it is functioning properly. Avoid using water bowls because they may tip over and soil the bedding.
- Ceramic food bowls are highly recommended. Avoid plastic because of chewing.
- Gerbils love to exercise. Providing a wheel is essential, choose a wheel that is **SOLID** because they can easily get their legs caught in wire exercise wheels.
- Keep housing out of direct sunlight and away from drafts.
- Clean the enclosure thoroughly each week.

## Handling and Enrichment

- It is important to handle your mouse frequently, especially when they are young. This will get them used to being around people and being handled and will ensure that they are more social and friendly when they grow up. Never grab by the tail, as the tip can easily come off! Giving treats (minimally!) while handling is a good idea to reward them and let them know being handled is okay!
- **ALWAYS** supervise children when they are handling to avoid possible injuries.
- They are active and curious, so it is important to provide cage furnishings that allow them to exhibit their natural behaviors, such as climbing, digging, and chewing.
- Rodent's teeth grow continuously, so providing hard materials for your pet to chew on is essential to keep the teeth from growing too long!
- Wood toys, twigs (untreated), sterilized bone, hard plastic tubing (such as PVC) and rodent toys work well for chewing
- They enjoy time out of their cage, but must be supervised! Remember gerbils and hamsters are active and curious by nature, so could easily fall or get lost when you're not looking. Exercise balls can be useful tools when providing out of cage time, allowing your gerbil to explore while keeping them safe, contained, and easily visible.



## Introducing Gerbils/Hamsters

- Gerbils are social animals by nature and can live in pairs or small groups if introduced when they are young. They are territorial by nature, so introductions should be done with extreme caution.
- Hamsters are different. Syrian hamsters should **ALWAYS** be alone, as they are very territorial. Dwarf hamsters can live in same sex pairs, and do best when introduced at a young age.
- Hamsters and Gerbils should **NEVER** be housed together.

## Health

- Rodent's teeth grow continuously so it is important to check their teeth frequently & provide plenty of items to chew on to keep teeth worn down properly.
- Consult with your veterinarian immediately if your pet appears unwell. Some signs that your rodent is ill include sneezing, difficulty breathing, lethargy and diarrhea.
- Rodents are also susceptible to external parasites such as fleas and lice. Always consult with your veterinarian before starting any treatments.

### **References:**

- <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/gerbil-care>
- <http://www.gerbilcare.org>
- <http://www.asPCA.org/pet-care/small-pet-care/hamster-care>