

Steps to Properly Care for Your



HAMSTER

Step 1: Picking a Cage

The ideal hamster home is as big as you can make it, full of deep bedding (4-6"+) to burrow in and lots of enrichment. Wire-top cages with solid plastic bottoms or aquarium tanks with wire lids are best. Minimum floor space is often cited as 450 sq. inches, the same as a 20-gallon long tank. A longer cage is preferred over a tall one. As a bonus, bigger cages fit more fun activities for your hamster and do not need to be cleaned as often! Try to avoid module cages with lots of tubes, as these are harder to clean and hamsters can chew the plastic or become stuck in the tubes. For an affordable option, you can convert a large storage tub into a hamster home!

Step 2: What to Include

Hamsters are most active overnight, so their cages should provide everything they need to stay busy while you're asleep. Every hamster habitat should have deep bedding to nest and burrow in, a solid (not wire) exercise wheel, hide boxes, food, a water bottle, and plenty of toys to chew, climb, and explore. Bedding can be made of unscented paper, hemp, aspen, or spruce, and will need fluffing up periodically. Wheels must be 10-12" in diameter to prevent injury—large enough the hamster's back doesn't curve while running on it. Some safe chew options include natural wood, grass balls, unsalted walnut shell, cork logs, pine cones, cardboard, lava rock, and hard Whimzees dog chews! Experiment to see what your hamster likes best, but offer a variety.



Step 3: Diet

Hamsters are omnivores and require diversity in their diet. Feeding a combination of lab block and seed mix is recommended. Lab blocks are nutritionally complete but “boring” to the hamster, whereas seed mixes are natural and exciting, but a picky hamster can choose which parts to eat and ignore the rest. Consider serving some or all of your hamster’s food in the forage or ‘scatter’ style by spreading it around the cage and hiding pieces for your hamster to find. This more closely mimics their natural feeding behavior and keeps their mind and body active! Hamsters will appreciate small amounts of extra protein, vegetables, and fruits in addition to their seeds and pellet.

Protein (1/2 tsp twice a week)	Vegetables (two nickel-sized pieces every other day)	Fruit (1/4 tsp once or twice a week)
Scrambled or Hard-boiled Egg	Romaine Lettuce	Apple
Plain Cooked Poultry	Kale	Pear
Dried Mealworms	Spinach	Banana
Crickets	Cabbage	Blueberry
	Broccoli	Strawberry
	Cauliflower	Peach
	Green Beans	Melons
	Peas	
	Squash	

Step 4: Cleaning

Hamsters are organized animals and prefer to pick one spot to do the majority of their business. Remove spots of soiled bedding and droppings daily. Expect to replace all soiled bedding with fresh bedding every week or so depending on the size of the enclosure. The entire cage should receive a thorough clean once a month with mild soap and water or diluted vinegar. Hamsters have very sensitive respiratory systems and cannot handle most commercial cleaning products, so be sure to pick something gentle and allow the cage to dry completely before moving the hamster back in.

Step 5: Handling

Do not wake up your hamster while they're sleeping to play—they may startle and bite. Wait until the evening hours for your hamster to become active before handling. When lifting a hamster, cup your hands on either side of their body and scoop. Always keep a hand under them to support their hind end. Go slow with your new hamster to build trust. If you want your hamster to enjoy time with you as much as you enjoy them, respect their space and don't force them. Adding some tasty treats into your handling sessions won't hurt either!

Step 6: Health

A number of common health issues can be prevented by reducing stress on your hamster and providing proper husbandry. Short bouts of diarrhea can be caused by overfeeding vegetables and fruits, so take care to introduce new food slowly and keep portions small. If you are sick, avoid handling your hamster, as they can catch some illnesses from us! Watch out for signs of respiratory sickness like sneezing, clicking, heavy breathing, runny eyes and nose, and general unwellness. Pay attention to your hamster's energy level and appetite. As your hamster ages, they are more likely to develop tumors, much like people. Always check with a small animal vet if you're concerned about any changes in appearance or behavior.



Veterinarian offices near the York area who see hamsters

Shiloh Veterinary Hospital

717-767-0180

110 Morgan Ln, York, PA 17406

East York Veterinary Center

717-840-1025

1997 Industrial Highway, York, PA 17402

Yorkshire Animal Hospital

717-755-4935

3434 E. Market St, York, PA 17402

Good Hope Animal Hospital

717-766-5535

6108 Carlise Pike #120, Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

York County SPCA

Contact Information

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