

## Common Hamster Ailments

**The best advice is to consult your vet if you think your hamster may be ill.**

**Impacted cheek pouches:** Swollen cheeks - remove anything like bedding caught there.

**Wet tail:** Wetness around tail end and soft stools - very dangerous, take it to the vet immediately.

**Skin Conditions:** Dry, flaky patches, redness or loss of fur - could be infection or old age, seek veterinary advice.

**Dehydration:** Lethargic, pull skin on back of neck, dehydrated if it stays up - give water and move to cool room.

**Wounds:** Infected sores - clean wound and separate from other hamsters, may need antibiotics, seek veterinary treatment.

**Ear trouble:** Shaking, scratching or loss of balance - take to vet, could be infection, injury or parasites.

**Eye trouble:** Running eyes, closed, dull or cloudy - could be infection or injury, keep in dark room consult a vet.

**Lung infection:** Shivering, wheezing, losing weight - very serious, seek veterinary advice immediately.



## Hamster Facts

Hamsters are clean and easily-tamed creatures, but they are nocturnal and **extremely active at night**. They are easy to keep but their **short life span** can be upsetting. Their average life expectancy is 18-30 months, but Syrian Hamsters tend to live a little longer than Russian or Chinese breeds.

**Gestation:**  
16-18 days

**Litter size:**  
6-8

**Maturity:**  
7 weeks for females, 4-5 weeks for males

**Weaning age:**  
21-27 days

**Eyes open:** 15 days

**Respiratory rate:**  
35-135 breaths per minute

**Body temperature:**  
37-38°C

**Heart rate:**  
250-500 beats per minute

### The Environmental Animal Sanctuary & Education (EASE)

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**Environmental  
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## The EASE Guide to Caring for HAMSTERS



Supported by the BVA Animal Welfare Foundation. Committed to improving the welfare of all animals through veterinary science, education and debate.



Hamsters are fragile, complex animals, not cheap toys, and the low purchase cost must be considered in relation to the potential vet fees.

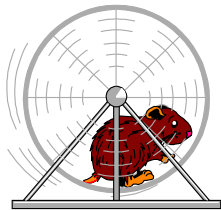
## A Home for your Hamster

Hamsters are active creatures, so buy the biggest wire or plastic cage you can, preferably with a plastic floor to prevent its feet from falling through the mesh gaps. Hamsters often fight and hurt each other when kept in pairs, so unless breeding, (not recommended unless experienced), house them on their own.

Hamsters like a constant temperature of 18-21°C. Make sure you don't place the cage in direct sunlight, near a radiator or in a draught. Place it away from electrical apparatus or any other pets. Hamsters sleep during the day and are awake at night, so keep your hamster in a quiet room.

Clean the cage with rodent disinfectant (from the pet shop), and spread a layer of wood shavings (not cedar which is toxic) or shredded paper (but not newspaper as the print is poisonous) on the floor. DON'T use synthetic fluffy bedding or cotton wool as it can become stuck in the hamster's mouth pouches. They like privacy, so provide a little house or box for them to hide away in.

You will need a food bowl and water bottle, plus plastic wheels, mazes or tunnels to keep your pet amused and active. The cage needs cleaning once a week and all the shavings replaced. Any food the hamster has stored away needs to be removed every couple of days so that it doesn't rot. Place a little of the old bedding in amongst the fresh to make it feel at home.



## Grooming your Hamster

Hamsters don't need grooming apart from the long-haired male Syrian breeds, which need an occasional groom using a soft toothbrush. They don't need to be bathed either as they regularly clean themselves. They do like to have a dish of sand (bought only from the pet shop) to roll in, as this removes grease from their coat. Remember that in the wild their normal habitat is the sandy desert.

## Food and Drink for your Hamster

Fresh water should always be available and placed where your hamster can easily reach it. Check **twice daily** that the water bottles are working by running your finger over the end of the spout. Liquid vitamins can be added to the water and can be particularly beneficial if your hamster is ill.

Feed your hamster daily in the evening, with a base diet of hamster seed mix which you can buy from pet shops. Their diet should be supplemented with small amounts of fruit and vegetables, e.g. cabbage, turnips, broccoli, brussel sprouts, carrots, apples, bananas and pears with small amounts of meat, fish, cheese and eggs. Do not give your hamster raw beans, tomatoes or chocolate as these can be toxic.



## Handling your Hamster

Your hamster will be nervous when you bring it home so let it explore in peace for 24 hours. It will also take time for it to get used to you. Be careful when taming your hamster as it may nip if you place your hand in its cage too quickly. Begin by putting your hand in the cage and just leaving it there for it to investigate and get used to your scent. Repeat this until it trusts you, and then you can start to stroke it gently. If you tap the cage carefully and call its name it will learn to come to you.

Hamsters are fragile, so be careful when you pick your pet up. Don't hold it up high in case it gets frightened and jumps; it's best to sit down when handling it. Let it walk from one hand to the other and when it is happy with this, curl your fingers around its body so it begins to get used to being held. If it nips don't worry - it's a sign it's frightened or because it is short-sighted has mistaken your finger for food, so leave it quietly in its cage to calm down. Never tell it off or pull it out of bed if it is sleeping as it may bite. **Make sure you wash your hands before and after handling your hamster.**

If you let it run loose, keep a close eye on it in case it disappears and **never** let it out in the garden. For exercise, pet shops sell hamster balls which can be used for **short periods** and **under strict supervision**.

## Hamsters and Hibernation

A Syrian hamster may hibernate if the temperature drops or if it is short of water. It may appear stiff and cold with little evidence of it breathing, giving the appearance of not being alive. Check the whiskers carefully as they will still occasionally twitch. Gradually warm your hamster to bring it round, which should take about an hour.



## Hamster Body Language

**Teeth chattering:** Annoyed, leave alone.

**Standing and staring:** Something has caught its attention and it is listening.

**Gnawing:** Their teeth grow continuously; give them a hard dog biscuit to help wear them down.

**Side Rubbing:** Marking their territory.

**Ears curled or laid back:** Annoyed, so do not touch.

**Digging:** Natural behaviour; give them a box with sand or shavings to delve in.