



**Cat Care of Fayette**  
(770) 716-5651  
www.catcareoffayette.com

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Pet's Name

# Your Pet Hamster



**Length:** Syrian hamsters, 6 inches; dwarf hamsters, 2-3 inches

**Lifespan:** 1½ - 3 years

**Cost per Year:** Approximately \$300

**As a Children's Pet:** Because of their nocturnal nature and tendency to nip, not appropriate for families with small children. Kids over 6 should be supervised by an adult when handling.

**Background:** Hamsters were first discovered in Syria, but they are native to many parts of the world. The name they go by today is derived from the German word "hamstern," which means "hoard"—because that is exactly what they do with any extra food they might find. Although their downright cuteness makes them popular with prospective pet parents, these animals have some special requirements that must be met in order for them to be happy and healthy.

The most common pet hamster is the six-inch Syrian, also known as the golden hamster or teddy bear hamster. Dwarf species such as the Siberian, Roborovsky's Djungarian, and Chinese are smaller than Syrians.

Although they've been viewed as the quintessential pet for kids, hamsters are nocturnal by nature—which does not fit well into a young child's schedule. If you are up in the wee small hours or won't be bothered by your pet's nightly digging, scratching and wheel-running, a hamster may fit in nicely in your home.

Hamsters also have gained a reputation for biting, but they mostly tend to nip when awakened during the day—the time they are "biologically programmed" to sleep. Children under the age of six should not be allowed to handle these fragile animals, and those over six should always be supervised by an adult.



## Hamster Supply Checklist

- ❑ 10-gallon aquarium (minimum) with wire cover, wire cage or plastic rodent habitat – paper bedding is preferred
- ❑ Small boxes or flower pots
- ❑ Exercise wheel (solid, no rungs)
- ❑ Cardboard tubes (recycle from paper towel and toilet paper rolls)
- ❑ Hamster mix
- ❑ Attachable water bottle with drinking tube
- ❑ Unpainted, untreated piece of wood or safe chew toy

## Housing

When selecting a cage, keep in mind the golden rules of happy hamster housing. Syrian hamsters are solitary and **MUST** live alone. One Syrian hamster per cage—no exceptions! Dwarf hamsters are social, on the other hand, and like to live in pairs. Do not house male and female dwarf hamsters together, since rodents breed quickly—and often—with large litters.

Keep your Syrian hamster in a wire cage or a ten-gallon aquarium with a wire-mesh top. The fancier cages with tubes, tunnels and hideaways are good, too, but they generally cost more and are harder to clean. If you have space for a larger cage, it will be much appreciated. Dwarf hamsters can be kept in a cage made for mice.

The enclosure should be placed away from direct sunlight and drafts, and lined with an absorbent bedding such as shredded paper or pelleted bedding. Do not use pine or cedar chips, as the fumes from these products can be harmful to your pets.

Hamsters are big on exercise, so please make sure yours has a wheel for running. Hamsters also like to hide and sleep inside enclosed spaces, so you'll need a small box with an entrance hole or a small flower pot for this purpose. And they love crawling through tubes, which can be homemade (empty cardboard tubes from paper towels and toilet paper!) or purchased from a pet supply store. And finally, you may notice that your hammy is a major creature of comfort. Remember to regularly give him small pieces of paper towel or napkin to shred and make a nest with.



## Diet

Your pet will do well on hamster mix, which contains seeds, grains, cracked corn and pellets, and is readily available at pet supply stores.

The ASPCA recommends that you supplement your pet's diet with fresh foods every two or three days. Try fresh grains, sunflower seeds and nuts (not too many, please, as these are high in fat), alfalfa pellets, and fresh fruits and vegetables such as spinach, lettuce, carrots and apples. Be sure to clean up any leftover fresh food before it spoils. Never give your pet raw kidney beans, onions, raw potato, rhubarb, chocolate, candy or junk food.

Fresh, clean water should be available at all

times. It is best to use an inverted bottle with a drinking tube, which should be changed daily. Curious hammy habit #1: Yes, your hammy will stuff his face (literally!) and then empty out whatever's in his pouch for some late-night snacking. That's why it's important to check the corners of the cage for any hidden stashes when cleaning.

## General Care

Don't forget your housekeeping duties! Remove droppings, uneaten food and soiled bedding every day. Every week, remove and replace all the bedding, and scrub the bottom of the cage with hot, soapy water. A hamster's teeth grow continuously, so your pet will need to chew—a lot—to keep his choppers in tip-top condition. Make sure he always has a piece of wood or twig that has not been treated with pesticides, other chemicals or paints. Pieces of dog biscuit will work well, too.

It's important to get your little guy (or gal) used to you, and used to being handled. Start by feeding your hamster treats; once he's comfortable accepting treats from your hand, you can gently and securely pick him up. Hold him for a short time at first, and then gradually increase your time with him. Once you've hand-tamed your hamster, every day you should let him play outside of the cage, in a secure, enclosed area, while you supervise. Be sure to remove any electrical wires from the area, and anything else your curious pet could, but shouldn't, gnaw on.



## Veterinary Care

A healthy hamster should visit the Veterinarian for a check-up every six months. If you think your pet is sick, don't delay—seek medical attention immediately. Common signs that something isn't right with your hamster may include dull-looking eyes, matted fur, weight loss, shaking, runny nose and diarrhea. Also note that hamsters seem to be susceptible to respiratory problems, especially the common cold, which they can catch from their human pet parents.