

Hamster & Gerbil Care Guide



Oxbow offers this basic care guide to help you keep your pet hamster or gerbil healthy and happy. Read below to learn what to feed your hamster or gerbil, as well as other important facts that will make you a confident pet owner.



Feeding Your Hamster or Gerbil

It's important to feed your pet correctly to keep him from getting overweight and unhealthy. Your hamster or gerbil requires a simple diet composed of a complete fortified kibble. Fresh water should always be available in a sipper bottle (even though gerbils drink very little water).

Fortified Food

A complete fortified kibble such as Oxbow's Hamster and Gerbil Food is a healthier option than a mix that contains a variety of seeds, nuts and dried fruits. Too frequently, pets will pick out their favorite pieces from a mix and leave healthy pieces behind. The best kibble contains all-natural grass and whole grain ingredients, with a shape ideal for nibbling to promote healthy teeth. Kibbles do not get lodged in cheek pouches like seeds, nuts and dried fruit can (a concern for your hamster). Oxbow designed Essentials Hamster and Gerbil Food to specifically meet the needs of these pets.



Treats and Veggies

Treats are a great way to bond with your hamster or gerbil. You love giving treats and your pet loves eating them! However, the main purpose of a treat should be to encourage interaction between you and your pet. Offering too many treats can lead to obesity and other health problems and rob your pet of proper nutrition.

Contrary to popular belief, your hamster or gerbil doesn't need a steady supply of seeds, honey sticks or fruit. Sunflower seeds, in particular, are high in fat. Offer healthy treats only after your pet eats basic foods. Hamsters and gerbils may have vegetables and fruits, but these should be considered treats rather than a staple in your pet's diet. Be sure to give only very small amounts. As with any new food, introduce new vegetables slowly to avoid upsetting your pet's stomach and causing diarrhea.

Hamster and Gerbil Behaviors

Hamsters and gerbils share many common behavior characteristics, but they are very unique as well. For instance, many hamster breeds are nocturnal and should be handled gently if picked up while sleeping. Gerbils, on the other hand, are very active, fast and rarely bite when handled correctly.

Hamsters are notorious for hoarding food and will create stashes around their cages for later consumption. Gerbils will often hide their food with bedding. Both animals love to chew on just about anything, and hamsters will stuff food, bedding, treats and anything else they find into their cheek pouches. It's a good idea to provide plenty of items to satisfy the chewing needs of both animals. Try providing hay, a wood block or empty toilet paper rolls to satisfy this natural behavior.

Some of your pet's behaviors might seem rather strange. You might notice them eating their own poop, for example. This is a natural behavior and a good way for hamsters and gerbils to receive extra vitamins and nutrients.

Hay

Supply grass hay to stimulate natural foraging activity to help in the prevention of obesity. Hay is an excellent source of nesting material. Use the Oxbow Hay Variety Guide found on every bag to help determine your pet's taste and texture preferences. Mix and match among the following, all-natural, farm-fresh grass hays: Western Timothy, Orchard Grass, Oat Hay, Botanical Hay and Organic Meadow Hay. Hamsters and gerbils especially enjoy Oat Hay, which often contains tasty immature seed heads.



When selecting more than one gerbil or hamster, make sure to ask if they are male or female. They reproduce quickly!

All About Hamsters & Gerbils

Treats should make up less than 5% of your gerbil or hamster's daily diet.

Housing Your Hamster or Gerbil

When setting up a home for your hamster or gerbil, it's important to take into consideration his living and nesting needs. Gerbils, for example, love to burrow, climb, dig and explore. Clear glass or plastic aquariums with a secure top are ideal living spaces for gerbils, as they prevent bedding from getting kicked out and accommodate burrowing.

Hamsters can live comfortably and happily in a variety of cages, including wire cages and glass aquariums. Plastic aquariums and cages are not ideal, as your hamster could easily chew through the plastic and escape. If you choose an aquarium for your pet, be sure it's routinely cleaned and has a wire mesh top. If you choose a wire cage, it should have a solid bottom with wires close enough together to prevent your animal from escaping. It's also a good idea to make sure the cage door is large enough to allow you to reach inside easily to handle or feed your hamster.

Provide a layer of bedding for your hamster or gerbil, such as Oxbow's all-natural Eco-Straw™. Avoid aromatic cedar and pine shavings, as they contain resins that might irritate your pet's skin and lungs. Be creative when setting up your pet's home. Decorate with hide boxes, environmental accessories, and habitat accessories such as a Timothy Club Hideout, Lounger or Tunnel, cardboard tubes, an exercise wheel and hay to provide opportunities for hiding, play and exercise. Grass hay can be an important addition to your pet's home, because it is an ideal nesting, digging, tunneling and burrowing material. Hamsters and gerbils love to chew on the hay and move it around during playtime.

Make sure you have these supplies for your hamster or gerbil:

- Oxbow's Essentials Hamster and Gerbil Food
- Variety of Oxbow's grass hays for nesting
- Oxbow treats for healthy bonding and enrichment
- Water bottle
- Heavy food bowl
- Cage designed specifically for hamsters or gerbils
- Wheel, tube and hay habitat such as Oxbow's Timothy Club Bungalow or Tunnel for hiding and playing
- Oxbow's Eco-Straw™ litter



Unlike some other small animals that are nocturnal, gerbils are awake during the day.

Picking up a gerbil by the tail can result in serious injury. Always scoop your hamster or gerbil up gently around the abdomen.



Your Hamster or Gerbil's Health

Many hamster and gerbil health problems are a result of poor nutrition, digestive or dental problems, or obesity. Contact your veterinarian if you notice the following symptoms:

- Wet or soiled tail
- Blood in the urine
- Sneezing or wheezing
- Overgrown front teeth
- Bald patches in the fur
- Hunched in the corner
- Sores on the feet
- Abnormal eating or drinking
- Lumps or sores on body

Regular veterinarian visits are a crucial part of keeping your pet healthy and happy. At each visit, your pet will be weighed and examined. Be prepared to answer basic questions about the animal's diet, behavior and health. If you have questions or concerns, make a list ahead of time so you'll remember what to ask.

For more information about hamsters and gerbils, read Oxbow's Small Paw Prints newsletter at www.oxbowanimalhealth.com.



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