

# Chipmunk - Facts & Care Sheet

Chipmunks are highly active animals that need spacious and stimulating housing. Despite being naturally ground-dwelling, they are excellent climbers and in the wild spend vast amounts of time foraging in small trees and shrubs. Males tend to live up to five years on average whilst females tend to live up to eight years or longer. Chipmunks can become hand tame, although this takes great patience, but can resent handling.

They are social animals and enjoy each others company, however males will usually fight. On average the lifespan for males is between 2 and 5 years and 6 years plus for females.

A healthy chipmunk should be:

Bright and alert.

No signs of discharge ears, mouth or nose.

A clean anal area.

A glossy coat with no sores on the skin and no bald patches.

Able to move around the cage easily.

## Housing

it is essential to have a large cage. Although there are several types designed for chipmunks aviaries (either indoor or outdoor) are preferable. The housing must be completely escape proof with a mesh size no bigger than about 25 x 25 mm. Aviaries should have a double door and solid base or one lined with metal mesh. Any wooden framing should be similarly protected. If kept indoors, the cage should be placed out of draughts and in a quiet room away from televisions and other similar electrical equipment as these emit sounds that whilst not audible to the human ear may cause the animals distress. A chipmunk enclosure must be furnished with an interesting selection of natural non-toxic pipes, perches, wood branches and shelves. Chipmunks become bored easily so it is worthwhile changing or moving cage contents on a regular basis. Nest boxes (one or more) should be provided with an entrance hole of 50 to 65 mm diameter. Those sold for birds like cockatiels are ideal. Chipmunks are hoarders of food so boxes should be checked regularly for stale or uneaten fresh food. Soft paper bedding or hay should be provided. Outdoor aviaries should have a dry protected area. Smaller cages will need to be cleaned and disinfected on a regular weekly basis as will any perches, branches or other decorations.

## Feeding and Water

Several diets available that are formulated for chipmunks, normally a mixture of cereals, nuts, dried fruit etc. Dry cat or dog food can also be fed in moderation. A healthy and varied diet is essential and so hard fruit and vegetables like apples, broccoli, carrots and cauliflower are suitable. Clean water should be available at all times provided in a drinking bottle. Always clean dishes and water bottles daily removing and replacing any uneaten food. Vitamin drops that are added to the water are useful and mineral stones or wooden chew toys will help keep your chipmunk s teeth trim.



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## Handling

Chipmunks often do not respond well to handling and may bite. With patience chipmunks may become hand tame once they overcome any shyness and fear. It is vital that boredom for the chipmunks is avoided. A combination of methods may be used to achieve this. Rearranging cage contents regularly is useful as is providing toys. Wooden ones are ideal as are the plastic ones used in conjunction with food or treats. These are normally sold for parrots. Fresh food and treats should be placed or hidden in different parts of the enclosure as chipmunks spend much of their time in the wild foraging, they will be stimulated by the search. A box containing peat or shavings allows digging and may be useful. Without adequate stimulation chipmunks can suffer from abnormal behaviour patterns. You should look out for repetitive behaviour like running backwards and forwards along the same route often for long periods of time. A good routine and a varied diet should help chipmunks to lead healthy problem-free lives. As with all rodents their front teeth grow continuously and need to be kept worn down by chewing. If your chipmunk's teeth get too long or you notice any other signs of ill health you should consult your vet.

## Shopping List

- Cage
- Aviary
- Water bottle and brush
- Chew toys
- Food
- Ceramic or metal food bowls
- Vitamin drops
- Mineral stone
- Perches, tubes and other
- Chipmunk care book

