

# Dwarf Hamster - Facts & Care Sheet

Dwarf hamsters make good family pets. They can become very tame with lots of attention and are easy to look after. Dwarf hamsters are ideally suited to older children and adults due to their size. Like Syrian hamsters, dwarf hamsters are nocturnal - they spend most of the day sleeping and become active in the evening and at night. There are three different species of dwarf hamster: Chinese, Russian and Roborovski.

## Chinese hamsters

Slightly thinner than Russian hamsters, Chinese hamsters have a slightly longer tail than most hamsters and are usually either a grey/brown colour with a black stripe, or white with a grey stripe. Easy to handle they are great climbers and cling to your fingers with their tiny paws. Chinese hamsters are very fast and therefore they are not suitable for young children. Male Chinese hamsters often live happily in pairs or groups but females can be intolerant of each other and may be better living alone. Chinese hamsters live for about 2 1/2 to 3 years.

## Russian hamsters

There are two types of Russian hamster: Winter White Russian and Campbell's Russian. It's difficult to tell the difference between the two Russian breeds but you'll know if you have Winter White Russian hamsters as they turn white in winter. Campbell's Russian hamsters can be beige, brown or black and white whilst Winter White Russian hamsters spend the summer in their brown coats and often become totally or partially white as winter approaches. Lively and sociable Russian hamsters will live happily in same sex pairs or groups. Once they're used to you they'll enjoy being handled. They're sensitive to rough handling and so are not suitable pets for young children. Russian hamsters live for about 2 years.

## Roborovski hamsters

Smaller and quicker than both Russian and Chinese hamsters Roborovski hamsters can be hard to handle at first until they get used to you. They are usually happy living in same sex pairs or groups and have a good temperament. They're very amusing to watch as they race around their cage! They tend to be a sandy colour with a white stomach and have cute white eyebrows and whiskers. Roborovski hamsters live for about 2 years.

## Sociable creatures?

Dwarf hamsters are sociable pets and like to be kept in pairs or groups. However, Chinese female hamsters may be better off alone as they may fight. If you choose to keep a pair or group of hamsters, you should buy them at the same time – they'll already know each other or will be young enough to make friends. New individuals will not be accepted into a group later on. As with all pets it's possible that your hamsters will fall out from time to time so provide lots of hideaway holes in their cage to allow them space to sleep separately if they want to.

## The best home for me?

Special care should be taken when choosing a suitable cage as dwarf hamsters are much smaller than Syrian hamsters. There are specific dwarf hamster cages available to accommodate their small size; plastic topped cages make ideal homes for dwarf hamsters as do Rotastak systems but mouse ladders may be required in the vertical tubes. Always buy the biggest cage you can afford. Whichever style you choose, as dwarf hamsters are very active and like to have lots of space to run around. Cover the floor of the cage with woodshavings and provide a paper bedding for nesting. Hay and straw should not be used because the tough strands could hurt their cheek pouches. Provide a house or bedroom so your hamsters can snuggle up and feel secure when they're asleep.

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## What do I eat?

Your pet will require a good quality hamster mix. You can supplement your pets' diet with very small quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables such as apple and carrot. Do not feed them too much fresh food as this can cause an upset stomach.

Vitamin supplements and mineral stones can be added to your pets' diet to keep them in optimum health. It's nice to give your dwarf hamsters a treat from time to time - small animal popcorn or fruit sticks are popular choices. Some hamsters also enjoy a millet spray occasionally - it's as much fun to rip apart as it is to eat the seeds! Ceramic food bowls are ideal for dwarf hamsters as they're sturdy, hard to tip over, easy to clean and gnaw-proof. Remove any uneaten food then clean and refill the food bowl everyday. You should also provide fresh water daily.

## Playtime

Your pets can be kept amused by providing toys and hiding treats around their cage, this also stimulates natural behaviour. Houses and tubes allow dwarf hamsters to have hideaway holes for food just as they would in the wild. Wooden gnawing toys are fun as well as helping to keep your pets' teeth short, so make sure there's always a gnaw toy in their cage. As dwarf hamsters are nocturnal, they're very active at night and need lots of toys to play with while you're asleep. Tubes and tunnels will keep your pets entertained and a wheel will allow them to burn off. Your pets can exercise outside their cage with a mini hamster ball, these are ideal as it means that and you don't have to worry about them escaping.

## How to handle me

Give them a day or two to get used to their new surroundings without being disturbed. When you first take your dwarf hamsters home, you should then start talking quietly to them so that they get to know your voice. Introduce your hand into their cage and perhaps offer a treat. Your pet may climb onto your hand but if not, gently scoop it up. You should handle your dwarf hamsters individually. It's important to handle your pets regularly to develop their confidence and maintain your relationship with them. Handle your dwarf hamsters over a table or close to the floor in case they fall out of your hands. Young children should be closely supervised when handling them. Remember that different species of dwarf hamster have slightly different temperaments. Roborovski hamsters are very active, quick and wriggle a lot and are therefore difficult to catch and keep hold of. Chinese hamsters also like to be handled and are usually very docile. They also love to climb and will cling to your fingers. Russian hamsters like to be held but they're sensitive to rough handling so must be treated gently.



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## **Personal hygiene**

Your pets' cage should be cleaned out thoroughly once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant. If your dwarf hamsters use one area of their cage as a toilet this may need to be cleaned more often.

## **Health & Fitness**

A healthy diet and hygienic conditions will help to keep your dwarf hamsters in good health but there are a number of potential problems that you should be aware of. As with all rodents, dwarf hamsters' teeth grow constantly so

it's important to provide wooden toys, mineral stones or treats for gnawing on. Dwarf hamsters can catch a cold just like you so keep their cage out of draughts. In cold weather give your pets more bedding and consider moving their cage into a slightly warmer room. If your dwarf hamsters get too cold they may become inactive as if they're hibernating. If this happens warm your pets up by holding them in your hands. All hamsters are susceptible to severe diarrhoea known as 'wet tail'. This condition can be caused by illness, inappropriate foods or stress brought on by moving house or rough handling. If your pet shows signs of being unwell contact your vet immediately.