

Syrian Hamster - Facts & Care Sheet

Do I make a good pet?

Yes...Syrian hamsters make good family pets and are ideal for both children and adults. With lots of attention they can become very tame and are easy to care for. Hamsters are nocturnal so they spend most of the day sleeping and become active in the evening and at night. Syrian hamsters generally live for two to two and a half years.

Sociable creatures?

Syrian hamsters are naturally solitary animals and if well cared for, they're much happier alone. Their territorial nature will lead to fights if they're kept as a pair. If you'd like to have more than one hamster consider keeping dwarf hamsters, rats or gerbils as they naturally live in groups.

What sort of home do I need?

Syrian hamsters need a lot of exercise. Therefore, you should buy as big a cage as possible, ideally with a plastic base and wire top. Wire sides will allow your hamster to climb around the bars of its cage which is a favourite pastime. If you own a cat, buy a cage with a plastic top to give your hamster added security. Always keep your cat away from your hamster. A multilevel cage will allow your hamster to climb and make the most of the space in its cage. Cover the floor of the cage with woodshavings and provide paper bedding for nesting. Hay and straw should not be used in your hamster's cage because the tough strands could hurt its cheek pouches. You should provide a house or bedroom where your hamster can snuggle up and feel safe when it's asleep. Make sure you keep your hamster's cage out of direct sunlight and away from radiators or draughts.

What do I eat?

Hamsters require a good quality hamster mix. If you want to change your hamster's diet, introduce new food slowly over a period of about 10 days, phasing out the old food completely. You can supplement your hamster's diet with very small quantities of fresh fruit and vegetables such as apple and carrot. Do not feed your pet too much fresh food as this can cause an upset stomach. Vitamin supplements and mineral stones can be added to your pet's diet to keep it in optimum health. It's nice to give your hamster a treat occasionally - small animal popcorn or fruit sticks are popular choices. Some hamsters also enjoy a millet spray - it's as much fun to rip apart as it is to eat the seeds! A ceramic food bowl is ideal for your hamster as it's 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.



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Playtime

Hiding treats around the cage and providing toys that stimulate natural behaviour will help keep your hamster amused. Houses and tubes allow hamsters to have hideaway holes for food just as they would in the wild. As well as helping to keep your pet's teeth short, wooden gnawing toys are fun too so make sure there's always a gnaw toy in your hamster's cage. Hamsters are very active at night as they are nocturnal and need lots of toys to play with while you're asleep. Tubes and tunnels will keep your pet entertained and a wheel will allow it to burn off energy. A hamster ball is ideal as it means that your pet can exercise outside its cage and you don't have to worry about it escaping.

How to handle me

When you first take your hamster home, give it a day or two to get used to its new surroundings without being disturbed. You should then start talking quietly to your pet so that it can get used to your voice. The next step is to introduce your hand into its cage and perhaps offer a treat. Your pet may climb onto your hand but if not, gently scoop it up. It's important that you handle your hamster regularly to develop its confidence and maintain the relationship. Never wake your hamster up abruptly and pick it up – this could frighten your pet and it may react by biting you. Handle your pet over a table or close to the floor in case it falls out of your hands. Young children should be closely supervised when handling a hamster. Most hamsters are very docile and with very little taming they'll come to you and eat from your hand.

Personal hygiene

Clean your hamster's cage out thoroughly at least once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant. If your hamster uses one area of its cage as a toilet this may need cleaning more often. Hamster sized litter trays are available that make cleaning a lot easier.

Health and fitness

A healthy diet and hygienic conditions will help to keep your hamster in good health but there are a number of potential problems that you should be aware of. As with all rodents, hamsters' teeth grow constantly so it's important to provide wooden toys, mineral stones or treats for gnawing on. Your hamster can catch a cold just like you so keep its cage out of draughts. In cold weather give your pet more bedding and consider moving its cage into a slightly warmer room. If your hamster gets too cold it may become inactive as if it's hibernating. If this happens warm your pet up by holding it 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.



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Dental

Gnawing toys are an essential part of your pet's dental routine and should always be available as they help to prevent overgrown teeth.

Vitamins and supplements

Vitamins can be added to your pet's food or water. Probiotic supplements can help to maintain healthy digestion and relieve stress. Getting used to its new surroundings can be stressful for your hamster so consider buying probiotic supplements when you take your pet home.

Grooming

Regular grooming helps to strengthen the bond between you and your pet and can highlight health problems too. Groom your hamster once a week or daily if it has long hair to keep its skin and coat healthy.

Cleaning and hygiene

Clean out your pet's home at least once a week using a pet-safe disinfectant.

