

## Hamster Care Sheet

### Loving Spirit Hamster Rescue

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#### NOTES ABOUT HAMSTERS

- \*Hamsters are nocturnal—they sleep during the day and are active at night.
- \* Although they are very small, hamsters can travel long distances. Wild hamsters can travel 5 to 12 miles in one night searching for food. They can run fast and jump.
- \*The female Syrian hamster is typically larger than the male.
- \*A hamster's lifespan is around 1,000 days or two to three years.
- \*Syrian hamsters must live alone or they will fight, sometimes even to the death. Dwarf hamsters can live in pairs if they are raised together. Even then, male dwarfs may need to be separated.
- \*Teeth chattering means your hamster is upset and should be left alone for a while.
- \*Hamsters have good hearing. They'll stand to listen closely to an interesting sound.
- \*Hamsters have a keen sense of smell. They use it, along with their whiskers, to navigate.
- \*Hamsters have poor eyesight. They don't realize how high up they are when on a sofa, bed, or other high surface, and they may walk right off, so it's important to always keep an eye on your hammy.

#### Recommended Supplies

**\*Suitable Housing:** At least 24 inches long, 18 inches wide, 16 inches high; secure, well-ventilated. My First Home for Rats is great for Syrian hamsters. Aquariums must be at least 20 gallons. For dwarf hammies, a 10 gallon tank is great, 20 gallon is even better (the long version). Wire cages often have big spaces where they can sneak out, but if that's the only choice, recommended is the All Living Things 24" Small Animal Home, a 20-gallon aquarium, or the Marchioro Happy Lux III. Any levels in the cage should be solid, not wire. Animals should never be made to stand on wire. Standing on wire is extremely painful and will cause wounds, sores, foot deformities and arthritis. Wire levels can be made safe by covering them with Magic Mats (available in pet stores), ceramic or vinyl tiles, cardboard (like cut cereal boxes), or other similar material. If you choose to keep your hamster in an aquarium, it should be at least 24 inches long and 12 inches wide. The aquarium should have a secure, well-ventilated, coated wire, screen lid. It is better to have a long aquarium with more floor space than a tall aquarium with unused height. Crittertrails, Habitrails, and/or SAM houses are not recommended. They are poorly made, break easily, do not provide proper ventilation, are very difficult to clean, and harbor odor. Just make sure they have lots to do to keep them busy!

**\*Bedding:** We recommend Kaytee Clean and Cozy Bedding. No Cedar, pine, chlorophyll, sawdust or cat litter. Care fresh can harbor mites, so it's not recommended, but can be used if put in the freezer 48 hours before use.

**\*Water Bottle:** Four ounce minimum. Do not use a water dish.

\***Water Bottle Holder:** for aquariums

\***Small Food Bowl:** We recommend ceramic.

\***Quality Food:** We recommend Harlan Teklad block, #8640 for Syrians, and #2018 for dwarfs. For Syrians, we mix in Supreme Hazel Hamster Food, and for added variety, brown rice- quinoa- rolled oats- barley. For treats, raw unsalted pumpkin, sunflower seeds, and raw pistachios or almond slivers. Dwarfs cannot have corn, as they are prone to diabetes and cannot have sugary foods or fruit (that's why hazel hamster food isn't recommended for them- unless the corn is picked out). The seeds and the rest of the mix is ok for dwarfs. The cheapest I've found the hazel hamster food at is petmountain.com. For Harlan Teklad, thecraftyrat.com is a great place to get it (just keep in mind it takes about a week to receive). Hartz, Nutriphase, and Kaytee not recommended for foods, as is any 'colorful' mix.

\***Tupperware Container:** To store unused food to prevent spoilage.

\***Nesting Box:** Hide-away, Igloo, Small Box...

\***Nesting Material:** We recommend unscented toilet paper. Do not buy the commercial "fluff."

\***Exercise Wheel:** It must be solid - NO rungs. Syrian hamsters need a minimum 8-inch wheel, such as the Wodent Wheel or Comfort Wheel (the Silent Spinner is too small). Dwarf hamsters can use the Silent Spinner.

\***Exercise Ball:** not recommended because of their limited eyesight, they often become very scared. Also if they're left in there for a bit, they will be running in their own excrement.

\***Rubbermaid Tub Playpen:** Inexpensive large tubs are available at Walmart, Target etc. Great for play time! I haven't seen any ham be able to get out of the high tubs.

\***Toys:** Tunnels, Tubes, Items to Explore...

\***Carrier:** Medium wire small animal carrier recommended, or the plastic "critter keepers" for vet visits.

\* Give your hamster fresh food every day. Dump out any uneaten food and refill the bowl. The best time to feed your hamster is the early evening, when she'd naturally be looking for food.

\* Hamsters need and enjoy fruits and vegetables. A great place to offer fruits and vegetables is in his playpen (see toys section above). You do not want your hamster to hoard fresh food in his house. It can spoil. If they eat spoiled food, it can make them sick. Remove leftovers immediately.

\* As with humans, dark green, leafy vegetables are nutritionally best. Vegetables that are suitable to feed your hamster are as follows:

Alfalfa  
Apple (for Syrian only)  
Asparagus  
Banana (Syrian)  
Basil  
Black berries (Syrian)  
Blueberries (Syrian only)  
Broccoli  
Carrots (Syrian only because of sugar content)  
Cauliflower leaves and stalks  
Celery  
Cherries without stones (Syrian only)  
Chestnuts  
Cilantro  
Cranberries (Syrian only)  
Cucumber – a favorite! Small piece of seedless cucumber is great per day  
Grapes (Syrian only)  
Green beans  
Kale  
Kiwi  
Mango (Syrian only)  
Okra  
Orange (Syrian only)  
Papaya (syrian only)  
Parsley  
Peach (Syrian only)  
Peas  
Plums without stones (Syrian only)  
Raspberries (Syrian only)  
Spinach- another favorite! Small piece of baby spinach per day  
Squash  
Strawberries (Syrian only)  
Sweet peppers (green, red, orange, yellow, purple)

Avoid iceberg lettuce, dried corn, raw beans, potato eyes, green potato, green parts of tomatoes, garlic, chocolate, processed foods, and any sugary or salty foods.

**\*DON'T FEED:** Foods that are poisonous to hamsters are as follows:

Onion  
Rhubarb  
Potatoes  
Green part of tomatoes  
Raw beans  
Leaves from tomatoes

**\*IN SMALL AMOUNTS:** The following foods can cause liver problems and should only be fed occasionally in small amounts: Cabbage Kale

\*Mineral and salt wheels are sold in pet stores but are not recommended because there is a danger that too much can cause dehydration.

## Health

Your hamster needs exercise each and every day. A good time to check your hamster over for health problems is when you bring her out every day. Look for listlessness, runny eyes

or nose, sneezing, wheezing, rattling, thin condition, ruffled stand-up coat, hunched posture, diarrhea, bloated belly, cuts, open wounds, and growths. Scruff your hammy and check her teeth to make sure they have not become chipped or fallen out (common in older hamsters especially). A healthy hamster will be curious and active, have a sleek, glossy coat, and be in good body weight. If your hamster should develop medical problems it is your responsibility as her guardian to take her to the vet—just as you would your child.

A healthy hamster has bright, shiny eyes, a thick, silky coat, a clean tail and rear end, and a dry nose. She will be lively and alert. On rare occasions, hamsters can catch an illness from humans. Do not handle your hamster if you have a cold.

Signs that your hamster is sick:

lack of energy

overgrown teeth

bald spots

overgrown claws

weight loss

avoidance of light

runny stool (poop)

excessive scratching

dirty, wet fur around the tail

swollen, red patches of skin

runny nose red or runny eyes

loss of appetite

swollen cheeks

A prevalent disease in the hamster population is the condition known as wet tail, *proliferative ileitis*. Wet tail is a bacterial illness causing severe diarrhea and even death. Signs are watery diarrhea and moisture around the tail, loss of appetite, dehydration, unkempt hair, rectal bleeding or rectal prolapse, and uncharacteristic irritability. Stress, sudden change in diet, overcrowding, extreme temperatures, and unsanitary living conditions are among the factors contributing to wet tail. A hamster showing signs of wet tail should be taken to the vet at the earliest sign. Only the vet should direct treatment.

### **HANDLING**

Before you pick your hamster up, make sure you have clean hands that do not smell like food. Make sure your hamster is fully awake and aware of your presence. Scoop your hamster up slowly and gently using both hands. Talk gently to him, and pay attention to body language. If he is scared and shy, a good “getting to know you” trick is going into a bathtub (clothes on!) and letting him crawl around you, getting to know your smell. Don’t try to grasp or pick him up, but make him have to crawl on your hands, and on you. After a few sessions he should be very used to you and picking him up will be easier.

In the case of aggressive hammies, taking a toothbrush and rubbing it on your hands to get your scent on it, and then petting the ham with it often will calm them down. Some species of hammies will always be prone to nipping (Russian dwarfs, for example) but there are ways to calm him down. Most often the aggressive ones won’t find you because often they’re not adoptable- but just in case you rescue an aggressive one in the future, you’ll have a plan of attack to try to make him into a cuddly friend!