



General care

Hamsters normally stay healthy throughout their lives. They can suffer from coughs and sneezes and their nose and eyes may run, so keep them warm and away from any draughts. If the symptoms persist seek veterinary advice. Hamsters can suffer acute diarrhoea known as 'wet tail'. If this occurs take your pet to the vets immediately.

There is normally no problem with hamsters' teeth. However if they do not meet properly they will grow too long and eating will be impossible. If this occurs the teeth must be clipped regularly.

Dwarf hamsters do not need to hibernate but will do so if there is a sudden drop in temperature below 5°C.

If your hamster escapes from its cage try putting a box or bowl in the corner of the room. He may well be in it the next morning.

If you are concerned about your hamster's health speak to your pet shop or your vet.



Shopping List

Cage/housing unit	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mineral block	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Food	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bedding	<input type="checkbox"/>
Food dish	<input type="checkbox"/>	Litter	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water bottle and bottle brush	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gnaw block	<input type="checkbox"/>
Treats	<input type="checkbox"/>	Toys	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book on hamster care	<input type="checkbox"/>		

This leaflet is produced by the Pet Care Trust, the national charity that promotes the benefits of pet ownership and education. For more information, go to www.petcare.org.uk, or phone 01234 273933.



Remember you must never release your pet into the wild.

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CARING FOR YOUR DWARF HAMSTER

Hamsters make good family pets. They are nocturnal so being more active in the evening allows the busy family time to enjoy them. They are small mammals so they are ideal for families with limited space. Hamsters make a suitable pet for children providing they are taught the responsibilities of their pet's routine cleaning, feeding and care.

The Dwarf hamster originates from Russia, Siberia and China. In the wild they live in burrows in the day to keep cool. They are active animals and travel great distances at night, They will carry food in pouches and hoard it.

The varieties available are Russian, Chinese and Roborovski.

Dwarf hamsters are social animals and can be kept in small single-sex groups or pairs. Animals should be bought at the same time, as it is unlikely that new individuals will be accepted at a later date.



The average life span of the Dwarf hamster is one and a half to two years.



Choosing and buying your hamster

A healthy hamster should be:

- ❖ Bright and alert
- ❖ Have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth and nose
- ❖ Have a clean anal area
- ❖ Have a glossy coat with no bald patches and no have sores on the skin
- ❖ Should have no signs of breathing problems
- ❖ Should move around the cage easily with no stiffness or staggering
- ❖ Should feel well covered and not bony



Housing

Plastic cages with metal tops are ideal as they are easy to clean and escape-proof. The cage should be big enough to provide adequate space to divide their accommodation into an eating, sleeping and toilet area. More space or two adjoining rooms or stories will add to their environmental enrichment. Systems cages provide good stimulation for your hamster.

Your hamster will take a lot of exercise. A small exercise wheel will assist him with this.

Hamsters are indoor pets. They should be kept in an even temperature, ideally between 17°C and 23°C. You should avoid putting the cage in draughts, direct sunlight or in damp or humid conditions. A sudden drop in temperature may put your hamster into hibernation.

Soft wood, dust-free woodchips make a good floor covering. Soft shredded paper can be used as bedding and nesting material. Your hamster's cage should be emptied and cleaned with a pet safe disinfectant at least once a week.



Feeding and Water

Hamsters are omnivores and so will enjoy a varied diet. A good hamster mix or pellet will provide the nutrition they require. This can be supplemented by small amounts of fresh fruit or vegetables but remember hamsters hoard their food and this can rot. Additional vitamin supplements or a mineral block can be added to your hamster's diet. Feeding bowls should be gnaw easy to clean and hard to knock over.

Soft fruit such as bananas should not be given to hamsters as it can stick in their pouches. Uneaten fresh food should be removed daily.

Fresh clean drinking water must always be available. It can be provided by a pet water bottle designed to suit your hamster's cage.



Handling

It is important that you handle your hamster regularly to help you build up a relationship with him.

When you first get your hamster home leave him alone for the rest of the day and night to get used to his new surroundings. Introduce your hand so he will get used to your smell.

When he seems happy gently cup one hand under him and one hand over him and pick him up. Always concentrate on holding your dwarf hamster as they can be very quick and can slip out of your hands.

Do not try to handle your hamster if he has just woken up as they feel vulnerable at this time and may bite.