

Caring for your Syrian or golden hamster

**How to keep pet Syrian or
golden hamsters healthy
and happy**



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Are hamsters right for me?

Syrian, or golden hamsters as they are also known, are attractive, undemanding, clean and easily tamed little pets.

They can be very active with great personalities, and if cared for properly, can live for up to 3 years.

Syrian hamsters are solitary creatures and must be kept alone once mature. They are nocturnal, so they like to sleep during the day and exercise at night.

Hamsters need regular cleaning and feeding and should be handled as often as possible. They make a good pet for children, provided they are always supervised when handled.

Choosing a new pet hamster

When selecting your hamster, check these signs that he is healthy:

- Alert and interested in his surroundings
- Clean, dry nose
- Clear eyes
- Clean, healthy fur
- Teeth are a good length
- Healthy appetite
- Breathes clearly
- Clean bottom

The first few days

Hamsters are very short sighted and get frightened very easily. When you first take your new hamster home it is best to put him in his new cage in a quiet room and leave him to settle in. This may take a couple of days.

Once they have explored their new home, you can open the cage and rub your hands in the bedding – this will take any unfamiliar smell off your hands. Begin by stroking your hamster down his back. If he is happy with this, place both hands under your hamster and cup him up inside.

To start with, don't try to pick up your hamster by putting your hand through the door of his cage. Keep hands low over the base of the cage so if he jumps out of your hands he won't get hurt. If this happens, wait a short while before picking him up again. You may need to do this for up to two weeks.

We recommend that you don't put your hamster in an exercise ball until you are confident holding him.

Creating a happy home

Hamsters are extremely active little creatures so it is important to give them as large and interesting a home as possible.

A large cage with ramps, ladders, galleries and tubes offers plenty of opportunity for exercise and a wheel is particularly important as hamsters have been known to run up to five miles in a single night.

A constant temperature of between 20 and 22°C is needed for your hamster's home

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as hamsters can lose consciousness at temperatures below 5°C or above 26°C. Window sills should be avoided as they can become very hot in the afternoon and cold at night.

The cage should be fitted with a good lock to prevent escape and should have an 8cm layer of woodchips in the bottom to absorb urine and to allow burrowing. Hamsters will tend to use the same area for their toilet.

A small box filled with bedding will provide some privacy for your hamster.

Hamster cages should be cleaned at least once per week with a spray suitable for small animals and dried with a tissue or clean cloth. Put some of the old paper bedding back in their cage to make it feel familiar.

A healthy diet and treats

Hamsters are omnivores and enjoy a small amount of animal protein. Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

The best time to feed them is early evening which is when they start to wake.



A healthy, varied diet would be:

- Basic hamster mix.
- A little fresh fruit and vegetables, e.g. apple, carrot, cabbage, celery, swede, raisins, grapes, etc (avoid citrus fruits).
- Hard food, e.g. cabbage stalks or a wooden chew will help wear down your hamster's teeth.
- A mineral lickstone provides essential salts and minerals and should be available at all times.

Treat them now and then with protein in the form of hard-boiled egg, cheese, chopped meat such as cooked chicken and beef or canned dog food or wholemeal bread.

Getting to know you

Hamsters are extremely short-sighted so in order not to scare him, make sure that he is aware of your presence before trying to pick him up.

Begin by stroking your hamster and then cup your hands around him to prevent him slipping out of your grip.

Hamsters are prey animals and if you reach over to pick him up from above he may react by giving you a nip.

Exercise your hamster needs

Exercise outside the cage is important and a special exercise ball will let him free exercise around the house with ease.

They can be exercising in their ball for up to 20 minutes once accustomed to their



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ball and should be fully supervised during that time.

If you let your hamster play outside of the cage be aware they can squeeze through tiny gaps and therefore can become lost in the house. Always monitor him during these play times.

Hamsters and other pets

Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and must be kept alone.

Hamster gender

Please ask a member of our team to confirm the sex of your hamster before buying.

Potential health issues with hamsters

Wet Tail

The main symptom of this disease is watery diarrhoea causing continual wetness of the fur under the tail. Hamsters suffering from this will show listlessness and loss of appetite. Prompt veterinary advice must be sought in cases of Wet Tail.

Respiratory disorders

Hamsters can catch colds and suffer from sneezing, sore nose and eyes. Ensure the cage is not damp or in a draught. If the problem persists, seek veterinary advice.

Overgrown teeth

Their long incisor teeth at the front of their jaw grow continuously and need to be worn down. The easiest way to deal with this is to keep a gnawing block in your hamster's cage.

Unshelled brazil nuts also help because hamsters are particularly fond of them.

If their teeth do become overgrown, they will need to see a vet.

Pet insurance for your hamster

Hamsters can be insured under plans for small mammals, however, it may not be possible to find an insurance plan specifically tailored to hamsters.

Your new pet checklist

- ☐ Cage
- ☐ Wood gnaws
- ☐ Woodchips
- ☐ Cage disinfectant
- ☐ Hamster bedding
- ☐ Food bowl
- ☐ Wheel
- ☐ Water bottle
- ☐ Brush for longer haired hamsters
- ☐ Mineral lickstone
- ☐ Food
- ☐ Treat
- ☐ Small holding box
- ☐ Cardboard tunnels
- ☐ Exercise ball

Help and further advice

If you have any questions about caring for your pet, our fully trained team are happy to help if they can, or advise on where to find more specialist information.

Whilst there is a wealth of information available online, only a professional will be able to correctly answer your query. If in doubt, call your local vet for an appointment.

It is against the law to release, or allow to escape, non-native animals or birds. If you have trouble caring for any animals contact our team for advice.



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