



## Hamsters, Gerbils, and Mice Diet and Care Recommendations

### GENERAL INFORMATION

**Syrian Hamster** (*Mesocricetus auratus*): Also known as Teddy Bear, Golden, Panda, or Black Bear hamsters depending on coloration and fur length. Syrian hamsters are solitary and must be kept singly after 8-10 weeks of age to avoid serious injury from fighting. Nocturnal, they do not like to be disturbed during the day. The average life span is 2-3 years.

**Campbell's Hamster** (*Phodopus campbelli*): More commonly known as Russian Dwarf Hamster. Unlike the Syrian hamster, Campbell's hamsters are gregarious and get along well in large groups. They will play during the day, although they are more active at night. The average life span is 2-3 years.

**Mongolian Gerbil** (*Meriones unquiculatus*): Also known as the Clawed Jird. Originally, the gerbil was brought to the United States for use in research, but because of its gentle nature and ease of care, gerbils have become a popular pet. They are social and prefer to be kept in pairs. Gerbils are from a very arid environment, so they have adapted to conserve water. They drink very little water and almost all the moisture in their stools is reabsorbed before defecating. Diurnal, gerbils are most active during the day. The average life span is 3-5 years.

**Common House Mouse** (*Mus musculus*): It is found in nearly all countries and is a popular pet. The average live span is 1-2 years.

### DIET

**Pellet:** Should be provided at all times. We recommend Regal Rat. Parrots (Psittacines) have very similar nutritional requirements to rodents, so we recommend some bird pellets as well: Zupreem Fruit or Natural, Harrison's Organic Bird Diet, and Roudybush Bird Pellet. Kaytee Rodent Blocks are okay but not recommended.

**Seeds and Nuts:** Do not feed a seed or nut-based diet! Seeds and nuts are high in fat and low in nutrients, causing liver and kidney disease, skin problems, and a lowered immune system.

**Fresh foods:** Should be offered a variety of fresh foods. Good choices include: dry and cooked pasta, cooked beans, peas, corn (a favorite!), squash, carrots, leafy greens, and breads.

**Treats:** Avoid foods high in sugar or fat. Hamsters, gerbils, and mice cannot digest lactose, so avoid dairy products. Good substitutes for foods like cheese and yogurt are soy cheese and soy yogurt. Occasional nuts are okay, but feed only sparingly. Mice are omnivores and can be offered occasional meat.

### ENVIRONMENT

Hamsters, gerbils, and mice should be kept in a cage that provides them with plenty of space to move

around, climb, nest, and hide.

**Cage:** Make sure to cover wire bottom cages with cardboard or towels. It is easy small mammals to get their feet or legs stuck between the wires, causing injury.

**Substrate:** Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Don't use cedar or pine shavings. The oils in shavings can cause skin and respiratory irritation, and can also cause changes in liver function. Alder shavings are okay but not recommended.

**Moisture:** Provide a water bottle or bowl of water at all times, and change the water daily.

**Furniture:** Provide at least one nesting box and plenty of nesting material. Watch for loose strings on towels or blankets. These can become wrapped around the neck or limbs and cause injury.

## **MEDICAL CARE**

**Exams:** Bring hamsters, gerbils, and mice in once a year for an annual health check.

**Spay/Neuter:** Spaying females decreases the instance of mammary and ovarian tumors. Females should be spayed before their first heat if possible. Neutering males can decrease aggression and decrease scent marking.

### **Common Illnesses:**

**Mycoplasmosis:** Caused by the bacteria, *Mycoplasma pulmonis*. Symptoms of infection include: sneezing, red discharge from eyes and nose (called porphyrins, which are released when a rat is under stress), wheezing, and congestion. Treatment is with oral antibiotics.

**Cystic Ovaries (females only):** Symptoms include: loss of hair, reddish discharge from vagina. Treatment is by spaying.

**Mites:** Symptoms include: hair loss, itching. Diagnosis is by performing a skin cytology. Depending on the type of mite present, treatment is with a bimonthly injection or flea and tick powder.

**Abscesses:** Usually caused by a bite wound, scratch, or tumor. They can develop quickly and become very large, occurring anywhere on the body. Treatment is by draining the abscess, flushing weekly, and giving oral antibiotics.

**Mammary Tumors:** Occur more often in females that are not spayed. Surgery is required to remove the tumor. These tumors can occur in males as well, but it is more rare.

**Bring your hamster, gerbil, or mouse to a veterinarian right away if it is exhibiting any of the following symptoms:**

Loss of appetite

Diarrhea

Rapid breathing or difficulty breathing

Extreme lethargy

Rapid weight loss