

Hamster Care 101:

Most of this information was obtained from experience, HamsterHideout online forum, and various hamster groups throughout Facebook. While nothing was directly taken from any groups, much of the general information that I have learned to write this article has been through Facebook groups and our veterinarian! Some links from HamsterHideout were used and all credit goes to them for those links and some of this information. Please give their forums a visit as well! They are a wonderful resource!

While this guide does not cover every detail to owning hamsters, it is a good start to learning the basic needs of your pet!

Hamster Habitats-

- Hamsters require much more space than pet stores often lead on. Critter Trail cages are not adequate for housing.
- Hamsters need a minimum of 450 square inches of unbroken floor space. This means that many small cages linked together with tubing does not suffice unless there is a main section that meets these requirements.
- 40g breeder tanks are the smallest tank sizes that meet that requirement. They must have a mesh lid to accommodate air flow. Spot cleaning should take place frequently to ensure that no respiratory issues take place.



- Bin cages also make excellent homes for hamsters. They are storage bins that have sections cut out and replaced with chicken wire, small cages pieces, etc. to ensure air flow. To properly measure a bin prior to purchase, measure the length and width of the **BOTTOM** of the bin. Multiply those numbers and if the number is 450 square inches or

greater, the bin is good to use! It is important to measure the base because the labels on bins will be measured from the largest part of the bin, which is oftentimes the top.



- You can also modify other small animal cages by wrapping them with chicken wire for use. You will want to do this because most small animal cages have bar spacing that is around an inch. Hamsters are escape artists and can easily squeeze out of tight spaces.



Sand Baths/Litter Boxes-

- Sand baths are incredibly useful to hamster care. Dwarf hamsters use sand baths often. Syrians also use them as baths, though sometimes they prefer to not use them as such. Many hamsters also use these areas as places to go potty. This is very helpful in keeping the cage clean and easy to manage.
- Reptisand (or any other reptile sand) without any added calcium is a great sand to use. You can also use store bought “Play Sand”, however this should be baked at low heat in the oven for a while to ensure the sand is clean enough for hamster use.
- It is important to remember that you want sand, so anything that is powdery, do not use! It can cause respiratory issues as they can inhale it.

Cage Mates-

- Almost all breeds of hamster should be kept alone. You may hear some stories of hamsters living together successfully or see them together in pet stores, but when they hit sexual maturity, most hamsters will fight to the death if kept together.
- Three of the breeds that CAN be kept together are Campbell’s Russian Dwarves, Winter White Russian Dwarf Hamsters (can be problematic), and Roborovski Hamsters. However, these need to be in same sex pairings or small groups and they should be siblings that have known each other since birth.
- Just because you CAN, doesn’t mean you SHOULD. Many hamsters that can live in small groups have to be split up due to aggression later. You should have adequate housing available for all your hamsters in case there is a dispute, and everybody must be separated.
- There should also be items for each hamster in the cage. Each hamster should get its own wheel, water bottle, house, etc. to ensure that there are never any fights for these items. The more of these items you can provide, the better! Also, you will want to avoid any tight spaces where a fight could happen such as tunnels or blocked off areas.

Bedding, Toys, and Play-things-

- Safe Common Beddings: aspen shavings, paper based unscented bedding (such as Carefresh), Kaytee Clean and Cozy, EcoBedding, and some hemp-based beddings.
- UNSAFE Common Beddings: cedar/pine/softwood/unmarked shavings of any sort, anything scented, anything made of corn cob products, and anything that is cotton/fluffy.
- Safe Toys include but are not limited to, brown paper towel or toilet paper rolls, wooden chew blocks, wooden/plastic tunnels or hides (watch for excessive chewing on plastic), wheels, and most pet store items made for hamsters as long as they do not have small/ingestible metal or plastic pieces.

Healthy Diets for Hamsters-

- There are many options to provide healthy foods for your hamsters. One of the most agreed upon staple diets is Mazuri Lab Blocks and Higgins Sunburst. You will want a mix of a lab block and a seed to ensure proper nutrition.
- HamsterHideout does a much better job than I could in summarizing the dietary needs for hamsters. I will attach the link on the next bullet point where they go through explaining why certain diets work, have lists of fresh fruits/veggies that you can give, and even have diet calculators to ensure you are feeding the proper diet.
- <http://hamsterhideout.com/forum/topic/96457-hamster-nutrition-v-safe-fruits-vegetables-and-other-dietary-supplements/>
- TIP: While Oxbow does a wonderful job at most diets, their hamster diet does not meet hamster dietary needs and can cause problems long term!

Wheels/Balls-

- Syrians: 8.5" wheels are okay for very small Syrians, however, going bigger is much better! You can never go wrong getting a 12" wheel for your Syrian.
- Dwarf breeds: 6.5" wheels minimum but an 8" wheel is much more ideal!
- Wheels can be plastic or wood but should never have grating on them because it can hurt a hamsters feet and give them bumblefoot. A wheel should be large enough that a hamster's back is flat while running on them. All these numbers apply to flat wheels as well.
- Balls should also be purchased larger than expected and run time in them should be limited to 15-20 minutes to ensure that their backs are not hurt from the round shape. Bigger is better for any hamster ball.

Common Health Problems-

- Yet again, HamsterHideout to the rescue with an incredibly wonderful common ailment section for hamsters. This section includes common ailments, symptoms, causes, remedies (when applicable) and more. However, neither our page or the Hamster Hideout forum are any sort of veterinary replacement. When in doubt, your hamster should see a vet as hamsters are prey species. Being prey makes them hide illnesses until they are more advanced than we can often treat. Being highly observant to your hamster and responding quickly is key to their health! The link is in the next bullet.
- <http://hamsterhideout.com/forum/topic/10605-a-z-guide-on-common-hamster-ailments-and-illnesses/>

Socialization-

- It is important to remember that hamsters can take time to socialize. Being small prey, their initial instinct is not to run up into your hands. Start slowly by giving healthy treats. Then, place those treats further and further onto your hand so that your hamster has to

stand on your hand to get them. Over time, your hamster should confidently walk onto your hand and you can begin slowly petting and acquainting yourself with your hamster.

- If you have a hamster that is not socializing well, it is important to remember to take it very slow. Most hamsters that are aggressive either have a rough past or not enough space! If your hamster is biting you, it may be time to evaluate how you are approaching the hamster and what their living space is like.
- Sitting in a blocked off area with your hamster is another great way to socialize as they can come to you and explore on you! This lets them pick their pace and activities!

Final Tips-

- Pet stores label Syrian hamsters as many different things such as “Teddy Bear” or “Panda Bear Hamsters”, these are all names for Syrian hamsters.
- It is important to always have an exotics vet that deals with hamsters ready, and annual visits for health checks are incredibly important to the overall well-being of your hamster!
- Always provide wooden chews as hamsters’ teeth never stop growing so they always need toys to wear them down!
- Even though it may take your hamster a while to finish their water bottle, it is important to refresh it with clean water often and to clean out the bottles.

This care guide was made by Shelby Vasquez for The Cavy & Critter Community as well as the Pullman Pets & Animals page!