**YVCipedia SMALL MAMMAL**

Degu Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Degus (*Octodon degus*) are medium-sized, highly social rodents native to the Chilean Andes. Adults measure 5–7 in (body length), weigh 6–11 oz, and typically live 5–8 years in well-managed homes. Being diurnal, degus are active during the day and display playful antics like communal digging and chatter. They form strong bonds with each other and their caregivers, and enjoy exploration and enrichment.

## **Housing & Environment**

A secure, multi-level wire cage with a solid bottom gives degus ample space to climb, run, and burrow. Provide at least a 35×50×24 in enclosure for a bonded pair, with deeper bedding to support natural tunneling. Cage placement should avoid direct sunlight and heat, maintaining a cool, stable environment—degus can overheat easily.

**Key Housing Details:**

* **Group living**: Keep same-sex pairs or small groups; they thrive communally
* **Minimum cage size**: ~35″ × 50″ × 24″ tall for two degus
* **Bedding depth**: ≥6″ of recycled paper or aspen bedding
* **Ventilation**: Wire sides with secure lid; solid bottom
* **Environment**: Temperate, dry, away from direct heat or drafts

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Degus need a high-fiber, low-sugar diet to reflect their wild grazing habits and protect against diabetes. Fresh grass-based pellets or chinchilla/guinea pig pellets (low sugar) plus unlimited hay form their diet foundation. Offer leafy greens and select vegetables in moderation. Never give sugary fruits or treats, as degus lack mechanisms to regulate glucose properly.

**Diet Essentials:**

* **Staple**: Unlimited grass hay
* **Pellets**: Low-sugar chinchilla or degu-specific pellets daily
* **Fresh food**: Limited leafy greens and veggies several times weekly
* **Avoid**: Fruits, starchy or sugary foods—high risk for diabetes
* **Water**: Fresh in bottle and/or heavy dish

## **Healthcare**

Annual veterinary visits ensure early detection of common health issues such as diabetes, dental disease, skin conditions, cataracts, and parasitic infections. With early signs potentially subtle, monitor behavior, appearance, and appetite closely. Regular health checks are essential due to their predisposition to metabolic and skin conditions.

**Health Reminders:**

* **Vet exams**: Post-adoption and then annually
* **Watch for**: Increased thirst/urination, weight loss, fur thinning, lethargy, cloudy eyes
* **Common issues**: Diabetes, dental overgrowth, cataracts, bumblefoot, parasites
* **Early action**: Prompt care is critical when illness signs appear

## **Behavior & Handling**

Degus love to burrow, forage, and socialize. They communicate via vocalizations and body language, often seen digging and sand dust-bathing together. For handling, scoop from beneath and support their body—never lift by the tail, as it may detach. With regular, gentle handling from a young age, they become tame and interactive pets.

**Behavior Tips:**

* **Social setting**: Keep in bonded pairs/groups
* **Handling**: Gentle scooping; full-body support; avoid tail lifting
* **Communication**: Listen for squeaks, chirps, and watch for tail flicks
* **Handling schedule**: Short, predictable daily sessions help trust

## **Grooming & Enrichment**

Degus maintain their dense coat with regular dust baths; offer pumice or volcanic dust 2–3 times per week. They’re avid chewers—provide durable wooden blocks, branches, and chew toys to keep teeth healthy. A clean, deep bedding layer supports their burrowing; introduce new toys and rotate regularly to stimulate their active minds.

**Grooming & Enrichment:**

* **Dust baths**: 10–15 minutes, 2–3× weekly
* **Chew items**: Safe wood and chew toys to wear down teeth
* **Cleaning**: Spot-clean daily; full cage wash weekly
* **Play**: Branches, tunnels, puzzle feeders, climbing structures

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Diurnal rats?** They’re active during the day—perfect for daytime interaction.
* **Chatterboxes:** Over a dozen vocalizations express moods—happy squeaks or nervous chatters.
* **Dust addicts:** Like chinchillas, degus love sand baths to keep their coat in top condition.
* **High sugar = danger:** Even a bit of fruit can result in diabetes, cataracts, and obesity.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Large, multi-level wire cage (minimum ~35×50×24″)
* ≥6″ deep recycled paper or aspen bedding
* Hay feeder and low-sugar pellets
* Fresh water bottle and heavy dish
* Dust bath dish with pumice/volcanic dust
* Durable wooden chew toys, branches, puzzle toys
* Hiding spots, tunnels, climbing shelves
* Secure, ventilated travel carrier

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