**YVCipedia SMALL MAMMAL**

Hamster Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Hamsters are small, solitary rodents known for their cheek pouches and burrowing lifestyle. Syrian hamsters typically live 1.5–2 years, while dwarf breeds average 1–2 years. Although nocturnal, many adapt to crepuscular activity patterns when given predictable routines. They are natural escape artists—capable of squeezing through tiny spaces—so a secure, well-designed habitat is essential.

## **Housing & Environment**

Hamsters require a safe, spacious enclosure with deep bedding for digging and nesting. The flooring should be solid, and materials like cedar or pine must be avoided due to respiratory risks. Enclosures should offer at least 100 × 50 × 50 cm for Syrians and similar-sized cages or tanks for dwarf breeds. Regular cleaning and daily access to escaped-proof play areas are vital for their wellbeing

**Habitat Highlights:**

* **Minimum cage**: ~40 in × 20 in × 20 in (Syrian); similar for dwarf types
* **Flooring/tests**: Solid base, ≥3 - 5 in deep paper or aspen bedding
* **Ventilation**: Wire top or tank lid; avoid plastic tunnels
* **Cleaning**: Spot clean daily; full clean weekly
* **Playtime**: Supervised time in escape-proof space daily

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Hamsters are omnivores, requiring a varied diet of high-quality pellet or block food, supplemented with small amounts of fresh vegetables, occasional fruit, and animal proteins like cooked egg or mealworms. Seeds and nuts should be limited to avoid obesity. Unrestricted hay is optional but can support dental wear and provide enrichment.

**Feeding Essentials:**

* **Pellets/blocks**: Commercial hamster-formulated diet - we prefer Oxbow at YVC
* **Fresh foods**: Optional - veggies (e.g., bell pepper, carrot), 1–2x weekly; protein once weekly
* **Treats**: Limited seeds, whole grains, or fruit (max ~10%)
* **Water**: Fresh daily via bottle; clean bowls optional

## **Healthcare**

Early veterinary assessment helps set baselines and detect common issues like wet tail (diarrhea), respiratory infections, dental overgrowth, and heart disease. Unlike many pets, hamsters don’t need vaccines. Monitor closely for changes in appetite, cleanliness, breathing, and mobility, as these often indicate serious illness and require prompt veterinary attention

**Health Insights:**

* **Vet visits**: Soon after acquisition; then at least annually
* **Watch for**: Wet tail, inactivity, nasal discharge, abnormal posture, fur loss
* **Urgent signs**: Inactivity, breathing issues, unkempt coat, weight loss
* **Dental care**: Provide chew toys for natural wear

## **Behavior & Handling**

Hamsters are best handled gently and briefly—ideally at dusk. Because they're solitary, most hamsters prefer solo housing and can be aggressive if housed together. Support their body fully when lifting, and always scoop them safely. They tend to bite when startled or stressed, so slow, calm approach builds trust. Many will learn to use a small litter corner.

**Handling Tips:**

* **Solitary housing**: Keep them singly to prevent fighting
* **Lifting**: Scoop from below; never grab scruff or scrunch
* **Habituation**: Begin with short, calm interactions at dusk
* **Toileting**: Can be litter-trained in a corner spot

## **Grooming & Enrichment**

Hamsters self-groom using sand baths—water baths are unsafe. Provide a dust bath weekly or more often. A deep bedding layer supports natural digging behavior. Include chew toys, hiding spots, tunnels, and exercise wheels (solid, appropriately sized) to meet their physical and mental needs.

**Care & Enrichment:**

* **Sand bath**: 10–15 minutes, weekly in dust like chinchilla sand
* **Bedding**: Deep, nesting-friendly paper/aspen layers
* **Toys**: Wood chews, tunnels, hideaways
* **Wheel**: Solid-surface wheel sized for the breed

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Cheek pouches** let them carry food and bedding to burrow.
* **Nocturnal but flexible**: Most become crepuscular with a routine.
* **Escape artists**: They can squeeze through 6–12 mm gaps—secure lids are a must.
* **Wet tail**: Common in stressed/young hamsters; watch for diarrhea, thirst, and lethargy.
* **Lifespan varies**: Syrians ~1.5–2 years, dwarfs slightly less, though genetics and care influence longevity.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Spacious, well-ventilated cage or tank (Syrian: 100x50x50 cm)
* Deep paper/aspen bedding (≥8 cm)
* Solid-surface exercise wheel (15–20 cm for dwarf; ≥28 cm for Syrian)
* Dust bath dish with chinchilla sand
* Ceramic food bowl, water bottle
* Commercial pellets; fresh veggie and protein portions
* Hideouts, chew toys, tunnels
* Secure, ventilated travel carrier

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