**YVCipedia SMALL MAMMAL**

Hedgehog Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

African pygmy hedgehogs (*Atelerix albiventris*) are solitary, nocturnal mammals with distinctive spines and endearing self-anointing behavior. They typically weigh between 12–20 oz (340–570 g), and live 4–6 years on average, though some reach 8 years. They’re generally shy but become curious and interactive with patient, gentle handling. Hedgehogs are best understood and cared for with awareness of their nocturnal habits and individual temperaments.

## **Housing & Environment**

Hedgehogs require a secure, escape-proof enclosure with ample floor space and solid flooring, as opposed to wire bottoms. Burrowing is a natural behavior, so provide deep bedding and a cozy hide. Maintain a stable ambient temperature (75–85°F), since hedgehogs may suffer torpor if too cold and stress-related illness if overheated. Enrichment items—like solid-surface wheels, tunnels, and toys—promote exercise and help prevent boredom.

**Habitat at a Glance:**

* **Enclosure size:** ≥2 × 3 ft (~24 sq ft) single-level with solid base
* **Bedding:** 3–4 in deep; paper-based, aspen, or recycled materials
* **Temperature:** 75–85°F; avoid <70°F or >90°F to prevent hibernation or heat stress
* **Ventilation:** Wire or well-vented plastic top; not glass-only tanks
* **Enrichment:** Solid exercise wheel, tunnels, chew-safe toys, hideaways

## **Diet & Nutrition**

A high-quality, commercial insectivore or hedgehog kibble is the dietary foundation. Hedgehogs enjoy supplementary live or freeze-dried insects (mealworms, crickets), occasional lean proteins (cooked egg or meat), and small amounts of fruits or vegetables. Avoid sugary, fatty, or dairy-rich foods. Portion control is crucial to prevent obesity, which is common in this species.

**Diet Summary:**

* **Staple:** 2–3 Tbsp commercial hedgehog or insectivore diet daily
* **Protein:** Insects or cooked lean meats 2–3× weekly
* **Veggies/fruits:** Small servings 2–3× weekly (spinach, berries, apple)
* **Water:** Bottle and shallow dish, refreshed daily
* **Avoid:** Raw meat, milk, high-fat treats

## **Healthcare**

Initial veterinary assessment is recommended shortly after adoption, followed by annual checkups. Hedgehogs commonly face health issues such as obesity, dental disease, tumors, respiratory infections, metabolic disorders, and parasitic infestations (mites). As nocturnal and prey species, they often hide early signs of illness; prompt veterinary care is essential. Special procedures like sedation may be needed for routine exams due to their self-anointing and curling behaviors.

**Health Highlights:**

* **Veterinary care:** First visit soon after bringing home, then yearly
* **Watch for:** Weight changes, lethargy, sneezing, abnormal stools, bald patches, limping
* **Common issues:** Obesity, dental problems, cancer, gastrointestinal disease, respiratory or parasitic infections, Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome
* **Handling during illness:** Offer supplemental heat and encourage eating; special medical attention may be required

## **Behavior & Handling**

Hedgehogs often curl into a ball when startled or scared, a defensive response that may last for hours. Hand taming requires patience—offer gentle, pacifying strokes (backward along spines) and handle in low-light. Avoid picking by tail. With consistent care, many hedgehogs learn to relax during brief handling sessions and may self-groom hands afterward as a positive sign.

**Handling Recommendations:**

* **Acclimation:** Quiet area, soft stroking, gentle speech
* **Lifting:** Scoop from below, providing full support
* **Bonding:** Short, calm sessions evening/nightly work best
* **Behavioral signs:** Hissing, self-anointing during stress; gradual reduction indicates comfort

## **Grooming & Enrichment**

Hedgehogs keep themselves clean; no baths needed, though a shallow pan for lounging can be provided. Routine nail trims and occasional checks for quill tangles help prevent injury. Regular cage cleaning helps maintain hygiene and reduce disease risk. Provide chew-safe toys and climbing-friendly structures to support their natural curiosity and need for gentle exercise.

**Enrichment Tips:**

* **Bathing:** No water baths—spot-clean when needed
* **Nail care:** Trim when toes spread or click on surfaces
* **Cage cleaning:** Spot-clean daily; full change weekly
* **Toys:** Rotate solid wheels, tunnels, chew items, and hide boxes

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Self-anointing** is when hedgehogs produce frothy saliva and spread it on their spines—this is a quirky, normal behavior.
* **Hedgehog balling** protects them from perceived threats; do not forcibly unroll—let them relax naturally.
* **Nocturnal habit** means they’re most active after dark; daytime disturbances may stress them.
* **Sensitive temperature**: Below 70°F may trigger torpor or hibernation-like state; over 90°F causes heat stress.
* **Toys and exploration** engage their inquisitive nature; a boring environment may lead to obesity or self-mutilation.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Secure enclosure (≥2 × 3 ft) with solid flooring
* Deep bedding (3–4 in) of safe material
* Solid-surface exercise wheel (12")
* Hideaways, tunnels, chew-safe toys
* Moderate-calorie hedgehog/insectivore diet
* Live/freeze-dried insects or lean protein treats
* Fresh water bottle + bowl
* Nail clippers, soft brush
* Temperature monitoring tools; supplemental heating if needed
* Car-safe carrier for vet visits

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