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*This handout is intended to provide only very general guidelines. Consult with your veterinarian about other aspects of advanced care that can be considered to ensure adequate health.*

## General Information

There are a large variety of hamsters from small, and extremely active dwarf hamsters to the larger more popular teddy bear hamster. Most hamsters can be kept together if they are the same gender, however some will still fight and will need to be separated. Males should not be kept with females unless they are neutered because they breed readily and have large amounts of offspring. Syrian hamsters should always be kept separately as they are too territorial.

## Lifespan

The average lifespan of most hamsters is ~2 years.

## Housing

Hamsters need a solid bottom cage at least one-foot-long with plenty of ventilation. Aquarium style cages are not appropriate due to poor ventilation. Hamsters urinate and defecate a lot so their cage should be cleaned at least twice weekly. Carefresh (recycled shredded paper) bedding is preferred to use at the bottom of the cage and should be piled at least 1-2 inches deep to encourage natural digging and nesting behaviors. Cardboard, wooden chews, grass hay, newspaper, and other destructible toys (avoid plastic) provide enrichment. Because hamsters will chew wood and plastic, only ceramic or metal dishes should be used for food and water. Water bowls get very dirty, so water bottles attached to the side of the cage are recommended. Fresh water should be available at all times. Exercise wheels may be used to encourage exercise. Exercise balls are popular but should be used with caution around stairs or other pets.

## Diet

There are many varieties of hamster food mixes, all of which generally contain a blend of fruits, vegetables, seeds and grains. Fresh vegetables or snacks may be offered such as leafy greens, or fresh pasta.

## Common Medical Conditions

### Trauma/Foreign bodies

- Broken bones, wounds and burns can occur if hamsters are left unsupervised outside of their cage

### Diarrhea or “Wet Tail”

- Bacterial infection causing diarrhea which then sticks to the tail causing a “wet tail” appearance
- This can progress quickly and cause severe dehydration

## References

*Animal Hospital in Centennial, CO.* Aurora Animal Hospital. (n.d.). <https://www.auroraanimalhospital.com/>  
*For Exotic Animal Veterinary Medicine Professionals.* LafeberVet. (2025, April 25). <https://lafeber.com/vet/>