

Health and welfare information about your rodent from Vetlexicon Rodent.



Housing your hamster

Proper housing is a major factor in maintaining healthy hamsters. The psychosocial well-being of your hamster must be a primary consideration. Hamsters can be housed within enclosures made of wire, stainless steel, durable plastic or glass. The last 3 materials are preferred because they resist corrosion.

What sort of housing should I buy for my hamster?

Wood and similar materials should not be used to construct enclosures because they are difficult to clean and cannot withstand the destructive gnawing of rodents.

Many pet stores sell durable coloured plastic enclosures that include attached horizontal and vertical tubes through which the hamster can crawl for exercise. These are suitable

enclosures for hamsters.

The enclosure must be built so the hamsters cannot escape. This is an especially important consideration because hamsters are proficient “escape artists”. In fact, once free of their enclosure, they are very difficult to find and rarely return to it.

How big should the housing be?

A hamster free to roam the house is a real liability because it will chew and gnaw on electrical and telephone cords, and household furnishings.

The enclosure you provide must be free of sharp edges and other potential hazards, and it must be big enough to allow normal behaviour/activities. A good 20 square inches of floor area per hamster is recommended, and a cage height of at least 6 inches. Hamsters seem to do best when housed in enclosures with solid floors, relatively deep bedding and plenty of nesting material.

The enclosure should be easy to clean, well lit, and adequately ventilated. Bedding must be clean, non-toxic, absorbent, relatively dust-free and easy to replace. Shredded paper, wood shavings and processed corn cob are preferred bedding materials. Cotton or shredded toilet paper makes suitable nesting material.

What should I provide for my hamster in its enclosure?

Hamsters are primarily nocturnal (night-active), though they may exhibit relatively short periods of activity throughout the day. During their active period, hamsters eat and exercise.

Hamsters seem to especially enjoy exercise wheels and other activities. Plastic enclosures equipped with horizontal and vertical tube-tunnels are highly recommended for this reason. Hamsters seem to really enjoy running through them. They also enjoy tin cans opened at both ends and boxes with multiple openings through which they can crawl.

Does my hamster need a playmate?

Hamsters are usually housed singly – sexually mature females must not be housed together because of their inevitable aggressiveness toward each other. Breeding females are larger than males and tend to be aggressive towards them. For this reason, males must be removed from the enclosure after breeding has commenced.

How often should I clean the enclosure?

The frequency with which the enclosure is cleaned depends on its design, the materials out of which it is made, and the number of hamsters in it. As a general rule of thumb, the enclosure and all cage “furniture” should be cleaned and disinfected once a week.

The food and water containers should be cleaned and disinfected once a day. More than one set of containers should be maintained, and the soiled set should be washed in a dishwasher, if possible. Vigorous scrubbing of the enclosure and furniture with hot water and soap and a thorough rinse should be followed by use of a disinfectant.