



About your Gerbil:

Gerbils are very active rodents and love to play, gnaw and entertain each other. They also love to groom each other and have communal sleeping habits. Because they are social it's a good idea to keep them in same sex pairs. (Opposite sex pairs can proliferate very quickly so be careful to determine the sex of your pets.) A word of caution, don't house gerbils with mice or hamsters because they will fight. Gerbils are also most active at night—so you may want the cage housed away from *your* sleeping area.

Housing

- As with hamsters, the rule of thumb is to allow gerbils as much space as you can afford.
- Cages can be aquariums, hamster cages, plastic tube habitats or metal cages.
- Cages should have solid flooring to avoid foot problems in your pet.
- A wire roof will allow ventilation but make sure it's always in place (gerbils can escape with as little as one centimeter of space, so be sure your lid is secure).
- There should be at least 10 inches of space between your gerbil and the top of his cage.
- At least 3 inches of bedding is recommended so your gerbil can dig and burrow.
- Bedding should be absorbent, non abrasive and clean such as hardwood shavings, shredded non inked paper or shredded paper towels.
- Avoid sand, corncob litter or kitty litter—they can make your gerbil sick.
- Bedding should be changed and the cage should be rinsed with hot water at least every two weeks. Remove gerbil droppings daily.
- The cage should be kept in a room with a steady temperature between 68 and 75 degrees fahrenheit. Rapid changes in temperature can cause respiratory problems. Gerbil cages should also be kept out of direct sunlight.

Nutrition:

Gerbils are herbivores. In the wild their diet consists of seeds, vegetables and fruits. Domesticated gerbils should be able to gain most of their nutritional needs from gerbil or hamster pellets sold at most pet stores. You can offer treats of dry oatmeal, raisins, peanuts, sunflower seeds (these have high fat so limit them), pumpkin seeds, and fresh vegetables, however, keep in mind that a gerbil's diet should be 16 to 22 percent protein.

Several servings a day will keep your gerbil healthy without letting him overindulge. Sipper bottles or a water crock are both acceptable ways for your gerbil to get his teaspoon of water per day.

Exercise and Play:

Every gerbil should have a metal exercise wheel to keep him mentally and physically fit. Wooden toys and clean natural branches will keep your gerbil's ever growing teeth under control. Cardboard boxes and paper towel rolls are excellent inexpensive toys and make great hiding places. Platforms and ladders will also offer your little climber hours of fun.

Health:

Gerbils have special cells that store water due to their desert origins—so they produce very little urine. For that reason gerbils are largely odorless. They also groom themselves. Don't grab your gerbil by the tail unless it is at the base right near the pet's body. Gerbil tails are easily broken and that will affect his ability to balance and play. One health tip: It's estimated that between 20 and 50% of all pet gerbils have seizure disorder epilepsy. If you suspect any health problems in your pet—consult your veterinarian.