

## CARING FOR SMALL PETS — Hamsters, Guinea pigs, Rabbits

### Pet Profiles



#### Hamsters

- Most active at night. Cuddly.
- Large cheek pockets for storing food and bedding.
- Prefer solitary lifestyle (do not get along well with other hamsters).

#### Guinea Pigs

- Active during the day.
- Friendly and easy to handle.
- Usually okay to keep several together. Many beautiful colours and breeds.



#### Dwarf Rabbits

- Active during the day.
- Appealing. Many beautiful breeds.
- Some timid or shy at first.

### Selecting Your Pet

#### Checking for health

Choose a clean, active and alert pet that is easy to handle.

#### Signs of good health

- Bright and clean eyes, clean nostrils
- Normal teeth, the top incisors slightly overlapping the bottom ones
- Shiny, clean and evenly distributed fur or hair

#### Signs of poor health

- Thin condition
- Watery eyes, runny nose
- Lethargy, rapid breathing
- Soiled fur, tail or bare spots

### General Care

#### Handling your pet

- Scoop up your pet with both hands, hold it in the palm of one hand and use the other hand for

support.

- Rabbits should be placed carefully in your lap — no bare legs though! Some rabbits are best picked up gently by the scruff — never the ears.

### Exercise

- Small pets need exercise outside of the cage daily, but always under close supervision.
- Plastic wheels are a favourite among hamsters. Other items offering tunnel-like places are great for your pet to sleep and play while small animal harnesses and leads are excellent for exploring a new room or a safe spot in the yard.

### Teeth

Your pet must have something safe to gnaw on otherwise overgrown teeth will prevent proper eating. Choose items designed for gnawing from pet shops.

### Grooming

Grooming tools are available at most pet shops. A soft brush is an ideal grooming tool for small animals while the larger brushes are for grooming long-haired rabbits and guinea pigs. Your vet can help you trim nails if desired.

### Reproduction

- Small mammals reproduce very rapidly. When the female is expecting, she spends a lot of time preparing the nest area. Good bedding offers safe nesting comfort.
- Remove the male from the den, for he will be a threat to the offspring. Be careful not to disturb the female during the first few days after birth. Give the female fresh food every day and extra vitamins and minerals after the young are born.
- Small amounts of high protein, high calcium treats and fresh items such as cheese and broccoli are recommended (for pet rodents).

### Illnesses

Any change in normal behaviour could be a sign of illness. Ask a vet if unsure. General signs of illness include:

- Disinterest in food and water, thin body.
- Difficulty moving, sleeps too much.
- Dull, runny eyes, a dirty or runny nose, overgrown teeth, swelling, patches of baldness, underdeveloped, dirty/wet fur or tail.

### Housing Your Pet

Your pet's cage should be spacious and well-ventilated - the bigger the better. Select a well-lit location away from extreme heat from sunlight which can cause sunstroke and death. Make the cage inaccessible to very young children and other pets.

Ensure it has everything your pet needs; proper bedding, food bowl, water dispenser, exerciser, etc. Also that it is secure and escape-proof.

Small pets like to stay clean and dry. A dirty cage causes stress and illness. Clean your pet's cage every second or third day, removing soiled litter and replacing it with fresh wood shavings or wood chips. Once a week empty, wash and rinse the bottom of the cage with mild detergent.

#### Feeding Your Pet

Feed hamsters good quality seeds from pet shops or supermarkets. Choose brands that have vitamins and minerals added. For guinea pigs, feed guinea pig pellets with added vitamin C, offering nutritional balance. Rabbit pellets provide a complete diet for rabbits. Alfalfa and timothy hay contain almost 30% fiber. Grass or timothy hay should be available every day to all rabbits and guinea pigs.

Treats for hamsters, guinea pigs and rabbits contain vegetables, grasses, roots, seeds and other favourites. They are nutritional and great for hoarding.

Fresh foods, including vegetables such as carrot and broccoli, are fine for small rodents and rabbits. Offer only small amounts at the beginning. Remove uneaten food to prevent decay.

#### Vitamins and minerals

Salt lickstone offers important minerals every time your pet gnaws or licks it. It also encourages water drinking which is very important to the long-term health of your pet.

You may wish to add multi-vitamins to seed diets. Simply place a few drops in the drinking water.

#### Water

Your pet requires a supply of fresh water daily, or it may not consume enough water to stay healthy. Water tubes and bottles help protect water from contaminants but still should be changed daily. Attach the water bottle spout at the right height so that your pet does not strain for water. Make sure that the spout is not blocked or leaking. Install water bottles vertically for proper operation. Clean the dispenser before each new filling.

Source: Hagen brochure