



# HAMSTER CARE: BEDDING

The depth of the bedding in a hamster's enclosure is very important. When hamsters burrow, they need at least 8 inches of bedding (in at least one area of their enclosure), to create sturdy and comfortable burrows. However, 10+ inches is recommended and the deeper the bedding you can give a hamster, the more burrowing/enrichment they will be able to engage in.



Having the right substrate for a hamster is also very important. Hamsters are natural burrowers and burrowing is a very important enrichment for them. Unfortunately, many beddings and substrates found in pet stores are unsafe for a hamster.

Some safe hamster beddings and substrates include paper-based bedding, aspen shavings, and hemp shavings. Paper-based bedding is the most common and recommended type of bedding. Some popular brands include Kaytee Clean & Cozy and Carefresh. Colored paper-based beddings are also safe for your hamster. Aspen shavings, also known as hard-wood shavings, are very safe for your hamster as well. Hemp shavings are not as common as aspen shavings and paper-based bedding, but they are still safe for your hamster's enclosure.



Some substrates that are hamster safe but should only be used in small parts of the enclosure are Kaytee soft granules, sand, Ecoearth, cork granules, beach chips, pillow moss, and hay. Kaytee soft granules are fairly hard and do not provide hamsters with the ability to burrow, however they can be great for providing texture in small parts of a hamster's enclosure. Sand should only be used in small amounts and in a hamster's sand bath. See the "sand bath" section for more details. Ecoearth is made of coconut fiber and can be found in the reptile section of most pet stores. It is hamster-safe but should only be used in small amounts in the enclosure to provide texture. Finally, hay can be a great enrichment for hamsters to chew on, and, when sprinkled between layers of bedding, can provide hamsters with more stable bedding to burrow in. Most hays are sold for rabbits and other larger animals so they can be sharp and stiff. GHR recommends Orchard Grass Hay, as this is a very bendable, soft hay that is hamster safe.



Some unsafe hamster beddings and substrates include softwood shavings, cedar shavings, pine shavings, scented bedding, cotton-nesting material, and corncob bedding. Softwood shavings are another name for any type of shaving that comes from a softwood tree. This includes cedar, Douglas fir, juniper, pine, redwood, spruce, and yew. Cedar shavings are not safe because a chemical called plicatic acid is found in cedar and has been found to kill cells. Pine shavings contain abietic acid and has been found to be a respiratory and skin irritant. Both pine and cedar shavings can also cause upper-respiratory infections or asthma which can lead to breathing difficulties and/or death. Sawdust and other dust should be avoided for the same breathing-related reasons. Scented beddings are not safe because hamsters are very sensitive to smell and something that might not smell strong to you, could smell very strong to them. To a human, living on scented bedding would be like spraying lots of perfume under your nose and then continuing to inhale it. This would cause lots of irritation to your nose. Hamsters can also get upper-respiratory infections from scented bedding. Cotton-nesting material is very dangerous to a hamster for several reasons. First, cotton has long fibers that can easily get wrapped around hamster limbs and teeth, cutting off circulation. Next, a hamster who is unable to free themselves from the cotton-nesting will resort to chewing off their own limb to free themselves. And last, cotton-nesting material is not digestible and if swallowed, it can cause blockages which can lead to death. Finally, corncob bedding is unsafe because any moisture that gets onto the bedding such as a water bottle drop, or hamster urine can easily cause fungus to grow on this type of bedding. Also, corncob bedding is very hard which can make it uncomfortable for hamsters to live on it and it makes it very difficult for hamsters to burrow.



All hamsters from GHR come with lots of bedding in their enclosure as well as one full bag of Kaytee Clean & Cozy, white, paper-based, non-scented bedding. Just like food and sand, bedding is something that your hamster will continue to need their entire life, so it is important that you always have extra.