



Most people that adopt hamsters do not know the basics of proper hamster care. As a result, hamsters are often not treated the way that they should. There is much to know about hamster care and a good hamster parent should do extensive research about it. Another reliable resource that you can look at is Victoria Raechel's YouTube channel. Victoria Raechel is a pet YouTuber who mainly focuses on hamsters and spreading the word about proper hamster care. Also, you can always reach out to Gretta's Hamster Rescue at [saveahamster@gmail.com](mailto:saveahamster@gmail.com) if you have any questions on proper hamster care.

In line with the mission to provide hamsters in need with proper care, hamster-care-education is extremely important to GHR. An overview of the Dos and Don'ts for proper hamster care along with an in-depth discussion of each of the important components of hamster care are presented as follows:

1. Dos and Don'ts of Hamster Rescue
2. Enrichment
3. Human-Animal Bond
4. When to Visit the Vet
5. Enclosures
6. Cleaning
7. Bedding/Substrates
8. Sand Bath
9. Diet
10. Water Bottles and Dishes
11. Wheels



# DOS AND DON'TS OF HAMSTER CARE

## DOS

**DIET DOS:** Feed your hamster a balanced diet, this should include grains, seeds, nuts, animal proteins, fruits, vegetables, and more! See "diet" section for more information.



**ENCLOSURE DOS:** Give your hamster a large sized enclosure including, a properly sized hamster wheel (10-12 inches), a water bottle or water dish, a food bowl, LOTS of enrichment (bendable bridges, chew toys, foraging treats, hideouts, etc.), at least 8-inch-deep bedding in an area for burrowing (10 inches recommended), and a sand bath with hamster-safe, clean, sand. See "enclosure" section for more information.



**WAKING YOUR HAMSTER UP DOS:** Wait until your hamster wakes up (usually around 8:00-10:00 at night) to play and interact with them.



## DON'TS

**DIET DON'TS:** Only feed your hamster sunflowers seeds and corn. These are very fatty foods and can lead to obesity.



**ENCLOSURE DON'TS:** Give your hamster a small enclosure, this can lead to shorter lives, bar-biting, pacing, lethargy, and boredom.



**WAKING YOUR HAMSTER UP DON'TS:** Wake your hamster up during the day. Hamsters are nocturnal/crepuscular and don't enjoy being woken up. This can lead to grumpy hamsters that are more likely to bite.





# DOS AND DON'TS OF HAMSTER CARE

**PLAYTIME DOS:** Use a playpen to give your hamster a change of scenery. Some options are store bought playpens, hamster-proofed rooms, bathtubs with drains closed, and homemade playpens. See “bonding tip #9” for more details.



**PLAYTIME DON'TS:** Bring your hamster outside. A lost hamster outside is basically a death sentence to a hamster. Bugs and pesticides can be very harmful to a hamster. Animals like eagles and hawks are natural predators for hamsters.



**BATHING YOUR HAMSTER DOS:** Give your hamster a sand bath so they can remove any excess oils from their coat, remove smells from their coat, and sometimes dig in the sand for extra enrichment. See the “sand bath” section for more information.



**BATHING YOUR HAMSTER DON'TS:** Bathe your hamster in water. This can be very stressful to your hamster, dangerous for your hamster, bad for their coats (because of the removal of natural oils), and overall, a very traumatizing experience for them.



**CLEANING ENCLOSURE DOS:** Spot clean your hamster's enclosure often. This includes removing soiled bedding and large gatherings of poops. It is a good idea to replace about 1/2 of their enclosure's bedding with fresh bedding once a month. See “cleaning” section for more information.



**CLEANING ENCLOSURE DON'TS:** Remove all of the bedding from your hamster's enclosure when cleaning. This is very stressful to the hamster as they mark their territory with their scent. When all the bedding is removed, it also removes the hamster's scent and studies show that hamsters can take almost an hour to calm down from it.







# DOS AND DON'TS OF HAMSTER CARE

**BONDING DOS:** Interact/bond with your hamster separately from your other pets. This includes holding them, letting them out of their enclosure to run around in a safe environment, getting any bedding out of their fur, and checking on their health and wellbeing. See "bonding" section for more information.



**BONDING DON'TS:** Let your hamster interact with your other pets. A scratch or bite from another animal will most likely kill or severely injure a hamster because of their size. There is no way to clearly communicate with another animal so it's best to keep hamsters separate from other pets.



**BEDDING DOS:** Use paper bedding, toilet paper, or other rippable and digestible materials in a hamster enclosure. Some hamster-safe substrates include paper-based bedding (non-scented), aspen shavings, and hemp shavings. Hamster-safe sand, Kaytee soft granules, Ecoearth, cork granules, beach chips, pillow moss, and orchard grass hay can also be used in small quantities in hamster enclosures. See "bedding" section for more information.



**BEDDING DON'TS:** Use cotton nesting material. The long fibers can get wrapped around hamster limbs and teeth. In fact, hamsters will even chew off their own limbs to free themselves from the cotton if they lose circulation. Cotton is not digestible and can cause blockages which can lead to the death of your hamster. Softwood shavings (mainly cedar and pine), saw dust, scented beddings, and corncob beddings are also unsafe substrate/bedding options.



**MULTIPLE HAMSTER DOS:** Keep your hamsters in separate enclosures if you want to own multiple hamsters.



**MULTIPLE HAMSTER DON'TS:** Keep your hamsters in the same enclosure. Syrian hamsters are solitary animals and become very territorial and aggressive when placed in the same enclosure. Even dwarf hamsters are not recommended to house together, as they can become territorial as well.





## DOS AND DON'TS OF HAMSTER CARE

**HOLDING HAMSTER DOS:** Hold your hamster low to the ground or close to your chest. Things like glass measuring cups can be very helpful to hold your hamster when you are moving from one place to another.



**HOLDING HAMSTER DON'TS** Hold your hamster high above the ground. Hamsters are very jumpy and can be very unpredictable. They also have very little depth perception, and they don't know how high they are. This means they could literally jump to their death without knowing it.





It is important that hamster owners do as much as possible to give their hamsters plenty of enrichment. While many people talk about the importance of large hamster enclosures, it is just as important to put lots of enrichment in your hamster's enclosure. A hamster will be much happier in a semi-crowded enclosure with lots of enrichment than an enclosure with just the bare necessities.



The easiest way to provide your hamster with enrichment is food and feeding. You can do this with foraging and enrichment foods. In the wild, a hamster would have to forage and gather for all their food. One thing you can do is get rid of your hamster's food dish and sprinkle their food all around the enclosure. You don't need to worry about them finding it because hamsters have an extremely good sense of smell. Another thing you can do is make fruits or vegetables more difficult to get by stringing them up and hanging them from the top of the enclosure. You can also give your hamster hamster-safe herbs, leaves, and flowers to provide them with fiber as well as some new smells. This can stimulate their sense of smell and be very good for your hamster. Dried plants and seeds, known in the hamster community as "sprays", are another way for your hamster to forage. Sprays make your hamster pick the seeds off of the plant like they would do in the wild. There are many different types of sprays such as black sorghum, white sorghum, wheat, flax, panicle millet, oat, mohair millet, yellow millet, pagima green, quinoa, amaranth, and many more. Unfortunately, most sprays are not very common in North America, so you are probably going to have to have them shipped from another country if you want to include them in your hamster's diet/enrichment. Here are some helpful links from Victoria Raechel on where to buy hamster herbs and sprays:

### Hamster Herbs:

- <https://www.starwest-botanicals.com/>
- <https://www.etsy.com/ca/search?q=hamster+herbs>
- <https://www.tinyflowersshop.com/>
- <https://www.priderockblooms.co.uk/>
- <https://www.happyhamsterhouse.co.uk/>



### Hamster Sprays:

- <https://www.redwoodgroveshop.com/treats>
- [https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/HammypalsStore?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing\\_id=953610069](https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/HammypalsStore?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing_id=953610069)
- [https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/Tinypawsandcompany?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing\\_id=963384171](https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/Tinypawsandcompany?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing_id=963384171)
- <https://fatpouches.com/>
- [https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/WonderhamsterShop?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing\\_id=954643100](https://www.etsy.com/ca/shop/WonderhamsterShop?ref=simple-shop-header-name&listing_id=954643100)
- <https://www.petsmart.ca/bird/food-and-treats/treats/all-living-things-oat-sprays-bird-treat-4151.html?cgid=400111>







<https://www.futterkraemerei.com/>

Herbs and leaves are not necessarily unhealthy for a hamster so you can't really give them too many. On the other hand, you have to be more careful with sprays depending on the type of spray. You have to research how healthy or unhealthy a spray is and decide how often and how many sprays you will want to give your hamster. For example, flax sprays are one of the most popular hamster sprays; however, each flax spray pod on a flax spray contains 7 flax seeds. This can easily become too much for a hamster.

Another important enrichment for a hamster is burrowing. Providing a hamster with lots of deep substrate is very important because it is not possible to burrow in very small amounts of substrate. In fact, most hamsters will not even attempt to burrow in less than 10 inches of bedding. Kaytee Clean & Cozy is generally very good at holding burrowing tunnels. It is also important to pack down the bedding when putting it into your enclosure. Also, if you are using a bedding that doesn't hold tunnels and burrows very well, you can layer the bedding with thin layers of hay to make it more stable. See the "bedding" section for more details. You will also want to make a large area that is deep because most hamsters like to make very complex burrows all over their enclosure.

You can also provide your hamster with different substrates to dig in. See the "bedding" section on what substrates are good in small amounts to place in dig boxes. It is important to note that a dig box is not the same as a sand bath. Sand baths are musts for all healthy and happy hamsters while dig boxes are an optional but recommended enrichment. See the "sand bath" section for more details.



Another great enrichment for hamsters is tubes and logs. These allow for a great natural texture for hamsters. Hamsters are naturally very much prey animals in the wild so an open and non-crowded enclosure can make them feel very vulnerable. Tubes and logs allow for more things for your hamster to hide under and explore. Cork logs and grapevine wood are really great because they are very natural and won't hurt your hamster if your hamster chews on them. You can usually find these in the reptile section of pet stores and on reptile websites. Other options for tubes and logs are bamboo roots, birch logs/tubes, and terracotta tubes.

Here are some helpful links from Victoria Raechel on where to buy hamster tubes and branches:

<https://www.reptilesrus.ca/decorations-and-furnishings/>

<https://www.northerngecko.net/decorations-and-furnishings/branches-cork-wood/>

<https://www.petco.com/shop/en/petcostore/category/reptile/decor-hideaways>





## HAMSTER CARE: ENRICHMENT

Platforms are great for hamster enclosures. They provide a way for hamsters to burrow underneath as well as a place to put things on top that might be too heavy to place on bedding such as ceramic hideouts or sand baths. It is important to note that platforms shouldn't be taller than 3" from the bedding for dwarf hamsters and 6" from the bedding for Syrian hamsters because hamsters have very bad depth perception and could easily walk off a platform that is too high and hurt themselves. You can make platforms yourself or buy them from certain websites.



Hideouts are another very important part of hamster enrichment. They provide protection and are great places for hamsters to start their burrows. You will want to provide multiple hideouts for your hamsters because hamsters generally don't like to be in open space very often as it makes them feel vulnerable. Hideouts come in wood, ceramic, terracotta clay, homemade cardboard hideouts, and more. When choosing wooden hideouts, you want to avoid anything with nails in case the hamster chews through it. You also want to avoid softwood hideouts as they could leak resin. You need to make sure that the entrances are big enough for whatever species of hamster you own. For Syrians and Chinese hamsters, the diameter needs to be at least 3" and for dwarf hamsters the diameter needs to be at least 2". Multi-chamber hideouts are very good for hamster enrichment as they simulate a hamster's burrow in the wild. Hamsters can choose different places to urinate, store food, and start their burrows. You can make your own multi-chamber hideouts as well. Here are some helpful links from Victoria Raechel on where to buy and how to make multi-chamber hideouts:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1JFwFbKrTMI&t=0s> (DIY Tutorial)

<https://amzn.to/3c0cUcs>

<https://amzn.to/3c2kHq0>

<https://www.rodipet.co.uk/houses/rodipet-maze/>

<https://www.getzoo.de/einrichtung-zubehoer/haeuser>



All hamsters from GHR come with a fair amount of enrichment in their enclosures however we strongly recommend that you get even more and have some extra so you can change their enclosure up occasionally.





Bonding with your hamster can be a long and difficult process. Hamsters have not been domesticated nearly as long as dogs and cats have, so bonding with them can prove to be more challenging. It can take quite a while to bond with your hamster. Here are some quick tips on how to bond with your hamster:

1. Do not compare your hamster to others. Every hamster is different so not every hamster will be the same when it comes to bonding and human interaction.
2. Let your hamster settle into their enclosure. The number of days you wait to let your hamster settle in depends on how comfortable the hamster seems, if they have been in a human home, if they are skittish, and if they have had a traumatic past. A hamster who came from a home where they had plenty of human interaction might only take a couple of days to settle in whereas a hamster who is very skittish or has had something traumatic happen in their life, will most likely take a bit longer. Settling in is important because it will be easier to bond with a pet who is used to their environment.
3. Get your hamster used to you. Things like associating your smell, sound, and the way you move with your hamster can all help them get used to you. You can take a bit of toilet paper, rub it on your hands and arms, and put it in the enclosure so that your hamster can start getting used to your smell. Another thing you can do is sit next to the enclosure and read books or work on your computer while either reading out loud or simply talking about what you are doing so that your hamster will become familiar with your voice.
4. Create a routine with your hamster. Feeding your hamster, changing their water, or spot cleaning at the same time every day will show your hamster what the routine is. Your hamster may even start to wake up earlier if they know that you are coming to give them food.
5. Practice lifting them out of the enclosure with a mug or measuring cup, so they get used to the sensation of being lifted. You can put a treat in the mug or measuring cup, so they want to climb in and then simply lift them up and out of the enclosure and right back in. It is important that you don't rush them and putting them right back into their enclosure will start to get them more comfortable with being lifted.



6. After your hamster has gotten used to being lifted with a mug or measuring cup, you can do the same thing with your hand. Again, be sure to put the hamster right back.
7. After a while your hamster will associate being lifted as a positive thing because they get to leave their enclosure. They now know that this is the only way to get out of the enclosure. You can let them onto the floor for some floor time or just let them climb on your hands and legs while sitting so they get even more used to you.
8. Snuggle sags or fabric pouches can be very useful bonding tools, however not all hamsters like them so you might not want to use them. You can also wear your hoodie backwards, so you have the hood at the front, and use this as a snuggle sack. Snuggle sags are dark, soft, and safe so this might make your hamster feel more comfortable.





9. Bathtub/free-roam bond with your hamster. Bathtub bonding is where you sit in a dry bathtub with the drain closed and let your hamster roam around the bathtub. You can put some toys in there and this allows your hamster to explore as well as climb up onto and explore you and get even more comfortable with you. If you have a hamster-proof room (ex. a bathroom with the door, air vents, and toilet blocked off), you can do the same thing with your hamster. Not all hamsters will enjoy this as this can be a big step. Some hamsters may fear the open space and display some erratic or anxious behaviors. If you notice this, the best thing that you can do is simply put them back in their enclosure.



10. Use treats to bond with your hamster. Treats/food can be very helpful tools in the bonding process. If you have a picky hamster who won't take or be motivated by treats/food, it will be quite a bit trickier to bond with them. If your hamster will take food and treats, they will think of you as the food-bringer which is a positive thing. Because you will probably need to feed your hamster more during bonding you won't want to use very fatty treats such as baby puff snacks, sunflower seeds, and corn. Instead, use things like dried vegetables/fruits, or just their normal seed mix. See the "diet" section for more about food and treats.
11. Have time and patience with your hamster. It is nearly impossible to create a bond with your hamster the day you get them. Usually it takes weeks, months, or even years to get a very special and trusting bond with your hamster. The most important thing is to keep trying to bond with them because the more regularly you can attempt to bond with them, the stronger your bond will end up being.

One thing that is worth mentioning is that some hamsters are "ghost hamsters". A ghost hamster is not a species of hamster, it is just a common term for a hamster who generally doesn't like human interaction. A ghost hamster is a hamster who usually doesn't come out until; very late in the night, or once you have left, or only if the lights are off, or only if there aren't people around, and they usually don't like human interaction. Hamsters don't need human interaction to survive so ghost hamsters aren't likely to live any shorter or have more health problems or anything like that. The most important thing about ghost hamsters is to **not force them to come out or play with you because it could make the problem worse**. Giving your ghost hamster a happy healthy life is the best thing you can do for them, and you might need to just let go of the human interaction piece of hamster care. If you have any more questions about ghost hamsters, you can check out Victoria Raechel's YouTube video "What is a Ghost Hamster?".



Hamsters should go to the vet for check-up appointments at least once a year. You will also need to bring your hamster to the vet if you notice something wrong with them. When you bring your hamster to the vet, be sure to see an exotic vet as they are generally more experienced with hamsters. All GHR hamsters see Dr. Sackal at Sunshine Animal Hospital. Sunshine Animal Hospital's address and contact information is listed below. Please feel free to reach out to GHR at [saveahamster@gmail.com](mailto:saveahamster@gmail.com) for help with veterinary appointments, scheduling, and more. We will help you get in touch with Sunshine Animal Hospital and can give Dr. Sackal any information about your hamster that we have access to.

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Dr. Sackal



Some signs that you might need to bring your hamster to the vet are lack of eating (keep in mind many hamsters have food stashes in their burrows), lack of drinking, lethargy, sudden behavioral changes (without clear cause), discharge from ears/nose/eyes (discharge from male and female genitalia is normal), wetness around anus, wheezing, coughing, dry/irritated skin, hair loss, overgrown teeth/nails, cuts, scrapes, bruises, lumps/bumps, wet poops/diarrhea, obesity, and more. **The best thing to do if you are unsure about your hamster's health and well-being, is to simply go into the vet to get it checked out.** Even if there ends up being nothing wrong with your hamster, it is always better to stray on the safe side when it comes to their health.





## HAMSTER CARE: ENCLOSURES

A properly sized enclosure is vital to a hamster's happiness and well-being. Below are some of the minimum square inches of floorspace for Syrian and dwarf hamsters from different organizations. Keep in mind that some hamsters will be unhappy even in the biggest of enclosures, so it is still very important to provide your hamster with proper enrichment and upgrade their enclosure size if they continue to be unhappy. See the "enrichment" section for ways to enrich your hamster.

### Minimum Square Inches of Floorspace:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) - 200 sq in

Canadian Council on Animal Care - 100 sq in

PetSmart - 144 sq in for dwarf hamsters, 200 sq in for Syrian hamsters

Hamster Society Singapore - 434 sq in for dwarf hamsters, 620 sq in for Syrian hamsters

Hamster South Africa - 465 sq in for dwarf hamsters, 558 sq in for Syrian hamsters

Ontario Hamster Club & California Hamster Association - 450 sq in

Wood Green Animal Charity - 620 sq in

TVT (Germany's Veterinary Association for Animal Welfare) - 774 sq in

Victoria Raechel's minimum is 450 sq in but she recommends 800 sq in

**Overall, the best thing to do is to give your hamster the biggest enclosure possible.** The hamsters that come from Gretta's Hamster Rescue are in 40-gallon glass breeders from Petco that have **almost 650 sq in of floor space**. These enclosures provide room for plenty of bedding, lots of enrichment, a large hideout, a properly sized wheel, and a sand bath. However, please feel free to upgrade your hamster's enclosure to a bigger size.





## Spot Cleaning:

It is recommended to spot clean a hamster's enclosure at least every three days. Every other day - every day spot cleaning is preferred. It is important to keep in mind that the size of the enclosure depends on how often you will need to clean it. Bigger enclosures will need to be cleaned out less often whereas smaller enclosures will need to be cleaned out more often.

When spot cleaning, look for areas that have lots of soiled bedding. Most hamsters choose one or two spots or corners of their enclosure to urinate. If your hamster chooses to urinate in their nests or burrows you will want to make sure they are fully awake before removing the soiled bedding. You also will want to attempt to keep your hamster's burrow intact when removing soiled bedding from them. It is very important to check a hamster's nests and/or burrows for soiled bedding as you do not want your hamster lying in or sleeping on soiled bedding. Many hamsters choose to urinate in their running wheels and sand baths. This can make spot cleaning very easy. However, some hamsters choose to urinate wherever they are, whenever they want. This can make spot cleaning a little bit more challenging but not impossible. One thing you can do is simply remove the top layer of bedding and replace it with fresh bedding. Another thing that you will want to do during spot cleaning is remove any large gatherings of poops in the hamster's enclosure. Hamsters tend to poop wherever they are when they need to so there will probably not be many large piles of poops in your hamster's enclosure. Do not feel the need to remove every single piece of poop in a hamster's enclosure as hamster poops are generally very hard and will not cause the hamster harm. Poop is also a territorial marker for hamsters and a way to orient themselves around their enclosure. Another thing to look for is any sand in the hamster's sand bath that is stuck together with urine.



To spot clean your hamster's enclosure, simply remove the soiled bedding and/or sand and large piles of poops and place them in a trash can. If you remove quite a lot of bedding or sand, be sure to place some fresh bedding or fresh sand in the enclosure or sand bath. You can use a dustpan or a plastic fork or spoon to help remove the soiled bedding and/or sand and large piles of poops. You can also use disposable gloves if you are not comfortable with touching the hamster urine or poop. It is important to wash your hands after spot cleaning so that you don't transfer any of the bacteria to your hamster which would defeat the entire purpose of spot cleaning.





## HAMSTER CARE: ENCLOSURE CLEANING

You might also find a stash of food when spot cleaning. Hamsters are naturally food hoarders, so it is important not to remove or relocate any part of the food stash. Even if there's poop in the food stash, you still shouldn't touch it or even remove the poops as this is normal.



Finally, you will want to check your hamster's sand bath for any pieces of bedding or other substrates other than sand. These substrates will not harm your hamster however they may make it more difficult for your hamster to dig in or clean themselves with their sand bath. You can use your hands or a sifter to remove the non-sand substrates from their sand bath.



### Regular Cleaning:

For enclosures with at least 450 sq in of floorspace, it is advised to clean out your hamster's enclosure no more than once a month. The most important thing about cleaning out your hamster's enclosure is to **not replace all of the bedding**. Half-cleans are recommended where you only replace half of the hamster's bedding. Studies have shown that when a hamster's enclosure is fully cleaned out with all of their bedding replaced and all surfaces scrubbed down that the hamster's heart rate increases, and it takes them almost an hour to calm back down. You can also decide to only clean out  $\frac{1}{3}$  -  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your hamster's enclosure instead of  $\frac{1}{2}$  depending on the size of the enclosure, how often you spot clean, and if your hamster chooses to urinate in more than one place.







# 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 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.



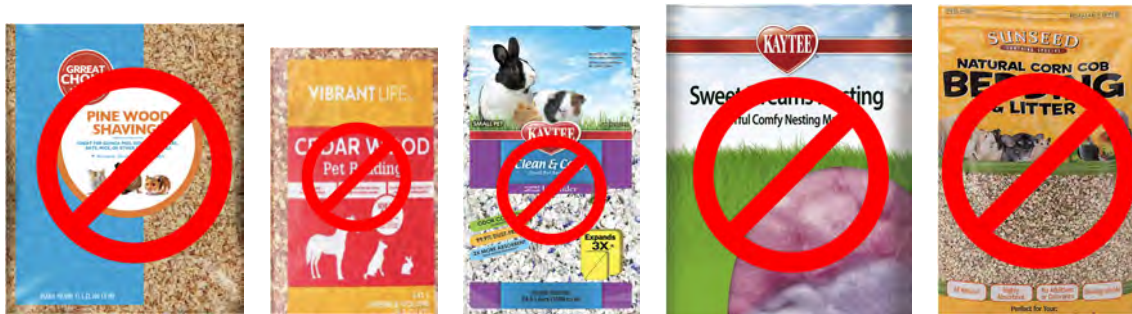
Some substrates that are hamster safe but should only be used in small parts of the enclosure are Kaytee soft granules, sand, Ecoearth, cork granules, beach chips, pillow moss, and hay. Kaytee soft granules are fairly hard and do not provide hamsters with the ability to burrow, however they can be great 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.



# HAMSTER CARE: BEDDING



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.



# HAMSTER CARE: SAND BATHS

Hamsters are considered to be very clean animals, and, like cats, they groom and clean themselves. As a result, hamster's coats have many natural oils that help their fur and skin stay healthy. Because of this, you should never bathe a hamster in water. Not only is this a very stressful and dangerous process for the hamster, but it also removes many natural oils from their coat that are very beneficial to the hamster's health.

Sand baths are a safe and easy alternative to bathing a hamster in water. Hamsters roll around in their sand baths to remove excess oils from their coat as well as eliminate any odors they might have. Some hamsters even like to dig in their sand bath for recreation and enrichment. See the "enrichment" section for more ways to enrich your hamster.



Providing a hamster with a sand bath is a quite easy thing to do. An old Tupperware or glass dish will work very well for a hamster sand bath. Many companies sell sand baths as well for fairly cheap prices.

Common  
Ceramic  
Dish



You can use several different types of sand for a hamster's sand bath. One option is Reptisand. Reptisand is a reptile sand that is animal-friendly and dust-free. This is the type of sand that GHR uses in all our hamster's sand baths. A cheaper option is children's play sand. Children's play sand can be found in large bags for very cheap prices. However, the important thing about using children's play sand, is that you must bake it in the oven at very high temperatures to remove any bacteria before putting it in your hamster's sand bath.







It is important to note that sand baths are safe for hamsters, but dust and powder baths are not. Things like Chinchilla dust and Critter Bath Powder are not suitable for a hamster's sand bath as hamsters have very small, sensitive lungs and dust or powder inhalation can lead to upper-respiratory infections, and eventually death.



You can also provide your hamster with other boxes of different substrates such as different hamster-safe wood shavings, Ecoearth, or other beddings to use as dig boxes and new textures. This will provide your hamster with great enrichment. See the "bedding" section for more options on hamster-safe substrates and the "enrichment" section for more ways to enrich your hamster.



All hamsters from GHR come with a sand bath and a full bag of sand, however, you will need to buy more sand throughout your hamster's life. It is very important to your hamster's well-being that you provide them with a safe sand bath.



A hamster's diet should be very balanced and include a variety of different ingredients. Despite popular beliefs, pellet food is not a suitable diet for hamsters. Pellets are fine for hamsters in small amounts but should never be used as a hamster's full diet. GHR uses the Kaytee Fiesta Gourmet Variety Diet for all of our hamsters. We also give them mealworms for animal proteins on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday as well as fresh fruits and vegetables on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. It is important that hamsters receive a healthy mix of grains, seeds, fruits, vegetables, animal proteins (such as mealworms), nuts, and more. Mixing different commercial hamster foods can be very beneficial when providing the right diet for a hamster however you will need to do extensive research. You can also make your own hamster seed mix but once again you will need to do research on how much protein, fat, and fiber to include in your hamster's diet.



It is important to note that despite popular belief, hamsters are omnivores, not herbivores. In the wild they have been known to eat plants as well as animal proteins such as insects and even small mammals. Because of this it is very important that you don't simply feed your hamster an herbivore diet. This could lead to malnutrition and a shorter life for your hamster. Mealworms are a cheap and easy way to provide your hamster with animal proteins.

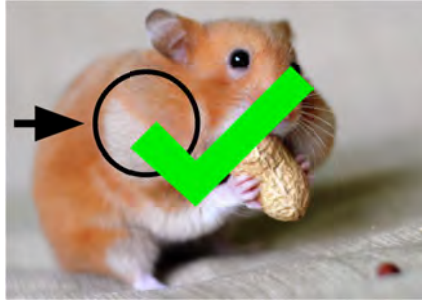
It is also very important that you are not feeding your hamster only sunflower seeds and corn. Unfortunately, most commercial food mixes for hamsters contain mainly just these two ingredients. While sunflower seeds and corn are both hamster-safe foods, they contain high amounts of fat and can easily lead to obesity.



You should feed your hamster once a day either in the morning or at night. It is not advised to feed your hamster during the day because they will most likely be sleeping but if you feed your hamster at roughly the same time each day, it will be fine. You should feed your hamster about 1 tablespoon of food per day (unless instructed otherwise by a vet). You may notice that all the food is gone but that doesn't necessarily mean that your hamster ate it all. Hamsters are known to stuff food in their cheek pouches and/or store food in their burrows. You can give your hamster hamster-safe treats however you want to make sure that you don't give them too



many treats as this can lead to obesity. Once a day is probably fine if the treats are small, however you won't want to do more than once a day.



All hamsters from Gretta's Hamster Rescue come with food dishes, as well as a full bag of the Kaytee Fiesta Gourmet Variety Diet food and a small Ziploc bag of mealworms. Just like sand and bedding you will need to buy more food throughout your hamster's life. We highly recommend that you continue to give your hamster fresh fruits and vegetables at least 3 times a week. GHR advises that you continue with the Kaytee Fiesta Gourmet Variety Diet food and mealworms as this is what the hamsters are used to and it is a very easy food to give your hamster. However, homemade food mixes or other brands of food mixes can be just as beneficial to a hamster. It is important to not change your hamster's food very often because that could lead your hamster to become a very picky eater and can also cause stress to your hamster.



Water is another very important aspect of a happy and healthy hamster. Most hamster owners use hamster water bottles to give their hamster water, but water dishes are another safe option. To learn more about the two options watch Victoria Raechel's YouTube video "Water bottles OR Bowls? | hamster care"

### Water Bottles:

Cleaning your hamster's water bottle every day (including the spout) is very important. You will also want to change the water in your hamster's water bottle every day, so they have fresh water. Do not fill the water bottle up all the way because this can cause more leakage, instead only put about 1 - 1 ½ inches of water in their water bottle. Some hamsters will drink more than others, so it is important to monitor your hamster's water often. You will also need to find a good position for the spout of the water bottle. Too low or too high of a water bottle can cause neck problems in a hamster and may discourage them from drinking water. It is also important to check your water bottle daily and make sure that the ball in the water bottle spout is working properly and that water can easily come out.



### Water Dishes:

In the wild, a hamster wouldn't have a water bottle so they would have to drink like they would with a water dish. Water dishes are also generally easier to clean, and they are easier for a hamster to get water from. It is suggested that you put a water dish on some sort of platform without bedding so that it is less likely to get dirty or be knocked over.



GHR is in the process of switching to water dishes as they are much more natural for a hamster to drink out of. We will give you an extra water dish with your adoption of a hamster in case the current one breaks or gets too dirty to clean. If both water dishes become unusable here is a link to buy more. This is a pack of 24 but it never hurts to have extras, and it is a very reasonable price.

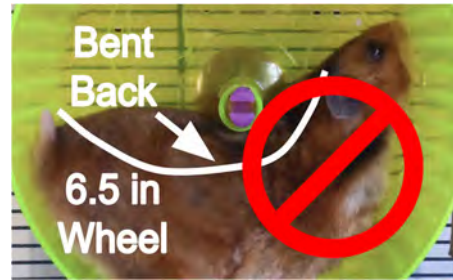
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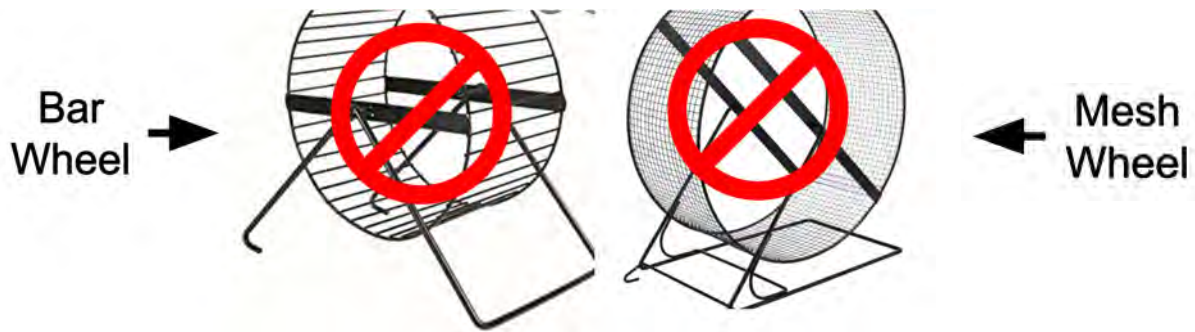


# HAMSTER CARE: WHEELS

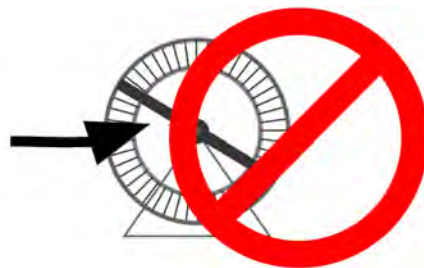
Having the right wheel is crucial to a hamster's well-being. Most pet store enclosures come with a 6.5-inch wheel which is **not** a suitable size for any hamster. When Syrian hamsters, or even dwarf hamsters attempt to run on a 6.5-inch wheel, their backs end up very curved which is very bad for them. Gretta's Hamster Rescue recommends at least an 8-inch wheel for both dwarf hamsters and Syrian hamsters and an 11- to 12-inch wheel for bigger Syrian hamsters.



Always avoid wire, mesh, or bar wheels when choosing the right hamster wheel. Mesh and wire wheels are very bad for a hamster's feet and can cause a disease known as bumblefoot where large blisters grow on the bottom of a hamster's feet. This is very painful for a hamster to walk or run around on. Bar wheels do not have a track of any kind and simply have metal rungs around the interior. When using a bar wheel it is very likely that a hamster could slip and end up hurting a limb or being pulled around the wheel which is very dangerous.



Another thing to avoid is having any sort of bar going across the wheel. Many hamster wheels have bars like this, but they are not safe. When a hamster is running very fast, they could slip and end up falling on the bar which would be a very dangerous situation for the hamster.





GHR also does not recommend saucer wheels. These wheels are usually much too small for a Syrian hamster to get good exercise and when dwarf hamsters use them, they are often flung off the wheel due to too much momentum.



Some safe wheels for hamsters include Niteangel running wheels, Exotic Nutrition Silent Runners, Kaytee Silent Spinners, and Exotic Nutrition Wodent Wheels. It is important to keep in mind that all of these wheels come in different sizes, and it is important to make sure that you are choosing the right size for your hamster. Most Niteangel wheels are at least 8 inches, but it is important to double check anyway. Exotic Nutrition Silent Runners come in 9 inches, 12 inches, and wide 12 inches. Gretta's Hamster Rescue recommends the 12 inches wheel as it is the most suitable for a hamster. Kaytee Silent Spinners are only safe to use in their large or giant size. The Silent Spinners come in mini, regular, large, and giant sizes. The mini is 4.5 inches and is not suitable for any type of hamster. The regular is 6.5 inches which, again, is not suitable for any type of hamster. The large wheel is 10 inches, and the giant is 12 inches making them both suitable for Syrian and dwarf hamsters. The Exotic Nutrition Wodent Wheels are sold in 8 inches, 11 inches, and 12 inches. Gretta's Hamster Rescue recommends the 11 or 12-inch wodent wheel, however, the 8-inch wheel also works if you cannot find anything bigger.

Niteangel Running Wheel



Exotic Nutrition Silent Runner



Kaytee Silent Spinner



Exotic Nutrition Wodent Wheel



All hamsters from GHR come with properly sized, safe, and fairly quiet wheels in their enclosures. However, if for some reason you must replace the wheel in your hamster's enclosure, be sure that you are choosing a properly sized wheel with a safe and healthy running track.