



Syrian Hamsters

You want your new pet to be happy – and so do we. So we've put together this guide to caring for Syrian hamsters, which is handy if you already have a Syrian hamster or are thinking about getting one. Syrian hamsters can make good family pets but may be better suited to older children and adults as they're nocturnal and are active later in the evening. And, of course, like all pets they need the right care & understanding. Likely to live around 2 years, with some living longer. Syrian hamsters are solitary animals when adults, which means they like to live alone.

A Happy home

The bigger the cage the better, so get the largest home for your hamster that you can. A deep plastic base will keep bedding contained and give them lots of opportunities to dig, while wire bars are great for climbing. Syrian hamsters need lots of exercise, so their cage is a place to play as well as to sleep.

The right place

Your hamster's cage should be out of direct sunlight, and away from draughts, radiators and electrical equipment. Try to keep it in a quiet place where they can rest undisturbed, and the lights go off around the same time each night. Remember, as they are nocturnal, your hamster will be up at night, so a bedroom might not be best.

Hamster housework

Clean your hamster's cage once a week with pet friendly disinfectant. Change their bedding, but pop some previous dry, unsoiled bedding and nesting material back as familiar scents will help reassure your hamster, as they can find cleaning their cage stressful. Any toilet area needs cleaning daily – hamster sized litter trays make this easier.

One of a kind

Syrian hamsters like living alone. Adults will fight if they live with others, as they are territorial animals. If you want more than one pet, other similar species of rodents (like mice, rats and some dwarf hamsters) are happier in groups.

Creature comforts

Add ladders, toys and tunnels for a great hamster playground. And don't forget that hamsters naturally love burrowing, so a deep layer of bedding (such as dust-free wood shavings or paper-based bedding) will provide endless fun. Avoid sawdust as it can make hamsters ill and is not recommended.

Snuggling up

Bedtime for Syrian hamsters comes when the sun rises, so they'll need a dark, sheltered space to curl up in. Add some comfy nesting material like soft hay or paper. Hamsters are especially fond of paper-based nesting materials they can shred to their liking. Don't use cotton wool or synthetic fibres which may get caught around limbs or cause blockages if eaten.

Winter blues

Keep your hamster's cage away from draughts. In cold weather give your pets more nesting material and consider moving their cage into a slightly warmer room. If the temperature drops and your hamster gets too cold, they may become inactive as if hibernating. If this happens, move your hamster to a warmer location and if they don't become more active within 24 hours seek veterinary advice.

Time to eat

Syrian hamsters should be able to eat whenever they choose. Use a flat, ceramic dish as it's hard to tip over, is chew-proof, and easy to clean. You may see your hamster with bulging cheeks as they like to hoard food in their own little larder! Scatter their food around the cage to encourage their natural foraging behaviour. But do check their cage every day, especially their larder and remove any uneaten food.

Fussy eaters

If you feed your hamster a muesli mix, they may only be eating certain bits and could miss out on important nutrients. To avoid this, you can feed your hamster complete nuggets instead.

Happy tummies

Your hamster will need a good-quality hamster mix or nuggets. As our hamsters are fed on Pets at Home food, we recommend you do the same to prevent upset tummies from a change of diet. If you do want to change their food, do it slowly. Introduce new foods over 10 days or so and phase out their old food completely.

Freshen up

Fresh water is a must for all animals. Check twice daily and change daily, use a suitable bottle and check it every day to ensure that water is flowing through and that the nozzle isn't blocked or leaking.

Fresh ideas

Forget 5-a-day – hamsters should have just one small piece of fresh fruit a week (like a small piece of apple) – too much fruit is bad for them as it is high in sugar, and they can develop diabetes. Hamster-friendly veg such as broccoli can be enjoyed more often, while millet sprays make a fun and tasty occasional treat. Don't be tempted to give your hamster too much fresh food as this could cause tummy upsets.

Settling in

Although it's hard, hold back your excitement and give your hamster plenty of time to get to know both you and their new home. Moving house can be stressful for small animals too. You might want to give them a probiotic supplement to help settle their tummy when you first bring them home. Without disturbing them, always keep a close eye on your new hamster. Leave them to settle into their new home for a few days before attempting to handle them.

Let's get acquainted

Being handled doesn't come naturally to hamsters, so building a bond with your hamster will take time and patience. Start by talking quietly to your pets so they get to know your voice and then carefully placing your hand into the cage (perhaps offer a tasty treat). But don't try to pick them up right away. Let your hamster come to you in their own time and climb onto your hand. Once they get to know you, you can start to handle them carefully using cupped hands.

Quiet time

To avoid causing them unnecessary stress, try to avoid waking up a sleeping hamster. This could frighten them and they may bite. They might also find it harder to trust someone who always disturbs them when they are asleep. It is best to handle your hamsters in the evening when they are naturally awake.

Handle with care

- Hamsters are wriggly, hold them while sitting close to the floor or a flat surface (like a table) to prevent injury if they fall
- Be really gentle when handling your hamster so they know you're not scary
- Never leave a child and hamsters unsupervised

Out for fun

Some owners have a separate playpen outside of the cage for their hamsters to exercise in. This is a great idea, especially of an evening when they're more active, but is only really suitable once you've got to know your hamster and their character a bit better. Make sure to put wooden or cardboard tubes, hiding places and toys in their playpen and always keep a close eye on them.

Hamster dig exercise

Happy pets enjoy activities that come naturally to them. For your Syrian hamster, that includes hiding, chewing, exploring, digging and foraging. Tunnels and tubes make more use of the cage space and give your hamsters things to explore and places to hoard their food. Dust-free wood shavings are ideal for digging in, and a wheel can give your hamster a workout. Solid wheels (rather than with open rungs) should be fitted securely to the side of the cage to help prevent teeny hamster feet from getting trapped.

A healthy hamster

A good diet and clean cage, as well as regular veterinary check-ups, will help keep your hamster healthy, but there are a few things to keep an eye out for.

Toilet habits

Infection (including bacterial), stress and unsuitable food can give your hamster 'wet tail' (severe diarrhoea). Take some time to observe your pets and get to know the signs of their normal health and behaviour as this will help you notice when something isn't quite right. If you notice any signs of your pet being unwell such as changes in eating, drinking and/or behaviour, or find their poo is moist or hindquarters dirty, you should contact your vet immediately.

Good hair and teeth

To keep your hamster's fur nice and clean, give your hamster a sand bath, using small animal bathing sand. Regular grooming may help strengthen the bond between you and your pets and can highlight health problems too. Gently groom your hamster at least once a week using a suitable small, soft brush or comb to keep their skin and coat healthy. Long-haired hamsters would benefit from gentle brushing every day. Hamsters' teeth never stop growing; so you'll need to give them something to gnaw on to keep those in good condition. We offer a great range of gnawing chews, wooden toys and blocks that will help prevent overgrown teeth and entertain your hamster too. Check your hamsters' teeth regularly and speak to your vet if you notice any problems.

Health and hygiene

All pets can carry diseases, some of which can pass to people. Always clean your hands with soap and water after handling or feeding your pets, or cleaning their home and equipment, and ensure children do the same. Always supervise children to ensure they do not put pets (or objects that pets have been in contact with) near their mouths. It is best to avoid kissing your pet. Children under 5, pregnant women, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems should pay extra attention to hygiene when feeding, handling or cleaning out pets, their housing and accessories. Do not clean pet equipment with your normal washing-up. If you are ever bitten by a small animal, the bite wound should be promptly cleaned and disinfected before being covered by a waterproof dressing. Seek medical advice if you feel unwell following the bite. Full detailed guidance is available at the Public Health England website:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pet-rats-mice-hamsters-reducing-the-risk-of-infection>

Adopting Syrian hamsters

Caring for Syrian hamsters is a big responsibility. If you think you're ready, have researched their welfare needs and you are committed to caring for them for their whole lives, why not consider giving a home to one of the rescue Syrian hamsters at our 'Pets Foundation' centres, RSPCA animal centres across England and Wales and other animal charities.

The five welfare needs

A good home - Your Syrian hamsters need a suitable place to live with a large cage and exercise area.

A healthy diet - The right food for a healthy, balanced diet and fresh water on tap

Ways to stay happy - The chance to do the things Syrian hamsters like, with somewhere to dig and things to explore

The right company - Being with, or away from, other animals

Help to be healthy - Protection against pain, injury, suffering and diseases

Happy Syrian checklist

- Large hamster cage
- Shelters for hiding and bedtime
- Dust-free wood shavings for bedding
- Shredded paper or cardboard for nesting
- Pets at Home hamster food
- Suitable fruit and veg
- Flat ceramic food bowl
- Hamster water bottle
- Bottle brush
- Exercise wheel
- Tubes and wooden toys

- Gnawing blocks or sticks
- Pet-safe disinfectant
- Hamster treats
- A book on hamsters
- Time in the evening for your new friend
- Local vet to register your hamster with

Are Syrian hamsters the right pet for you?

We know getting a new pet can be an exciting time, but before you commit, why not take some time to talk through these questions with your family?

Who are the hamsters for?

Hamsters are nocturnal, so they are not suitable for young children. Even if older children look after them, remember an adult will be responsible for ensuring they are cared for properly everyday.

Do I have enough space?

You'll need room for a large cage, indoors and away from other pets, in a quiet place where your hamster can rest, and won't disturb light sleepers.

Can I afford a hamster? Hamsters are not cheap pets.

Consider the costs of buying food, bedding and toys on a regular basis, and paying for holiday care and vet's fees.

Do I have the time?

Feeding, cleaning, health checking and bonding with your hamster are tasks that are vital to your pet's wellbeing and need to be done every day, usually in the evening when your pet is awake.

Can I commit to looking after hamsters?

The average Syrian hamster lives for around 2 years, but it could be longer. In that time your older children may leave home. Also, think about how often you may go away on holiday.

Who'll care for your hamster every day?

Hamsters can be wonderful pets, but they need wonderful owners too.



Dwarf Hamsters

An introduction to caring for dwarf hamsters

You want your new pet to be happy – and so do we. So, we've put together this guide to caring for dwarf hamsters, handy if you already have a dwarf hamster or are thinking about getting one. Dwarf hamsters can make good family pets but may be better suited to older children and adults as they're nocturnal and are active later in the evening. And, of course, like all pets they need the right care and understanding.

Likely to live: around two years, with some living longer.

Good to know

There are three types of dwarf hamsters commonly kept as pets: Russian hamsters tend to prefer to be kept alone. Chinese hamsters are great climbers, and Roborovski hamsters are the smallest and fastest, so they can be harder to handle.

Perfect partners

Chinese dwarf hamsters prefer to live alone. Other dwarf hamsters may be more social and can sometimes live in pairs/groups if they are provided with appropriate conditions and care is taken to provide a very large home as well as multiple resources such as toys, bowls, water bottles and hides. If you are unable to provide these, or based on the hamsters' personalities, it is better for them to live alone. Any dwarf hamsters that live together should have grown up together and be of the same sex. If you do keep two or more together, you will need to give your hamsters lots of space and hiding places so they can get away from each other and check daily that they're getting on. Any signs of fighting or falling out and they'll need housing separately to prevent injuries. Even for species that can live together, individual hamsters will differ as to how well they will get along with others and you should be prepared to house them separately if required.

A happy home

They may be small, but dwarf hamsters need big cages as they're very active and playful. It should have a deep base filled with dust-free wood shavings as dwarf hamsters love to dig and burrow. Avoid sawdust as it can make hamsters ill. Add shelters as well, but with two entrances so squabbling hamsters can't block each other.

The right place

Your hamster's cage should be out of direct sunlight, and away from draughts, radiators and electrical equipment. Try to keep it in a quiet place and where the lights go off around the same time each night. Remember, as they are nocturnal, your hamster will be up at night, so a bedroom might not be best.

Creature comforts

Add ladders and tunnels for the perfect hamster playground. If you have more than one dwarf hamster, make sure there are enough shelters, toys, food bowls and bottles so that they have at least one each to help prevent squabbling.

Snuggling up

Bedtime for dwarf hamsters comes when the sun rises, so they'll need a dark, sheltered space to curl up in. Add some comfy nesting material like soft hay or paper they can shred. Do not use cotton wool for bedding or synthetic fibres which may get caught around limbs or cause blockages if eaten.

Hamster housework

Clean your hamster's cage once a week with pet-friendly disinfectant. Change their bedding, but pop some previous dry, unsoiled bedding back as familiar scents will help reassure your hamster. Any toilet area needs cleaning daily – hamster sized litter trays make this easy – and check their cage every day to remove any uneaten food.

Time to eat

Hamsters should be able to eat whenever they choose. Use a flat, ceramic dish as it's hard to tip over, is chew-proof, and easy to clean. You may see your hamster with bulging cheeks, as they like to hoard food in their own little larder! Scatter their food around the cage to encourage their natural foraging behaviour. But do check their cage every day, (especially their larder) and remove any uneaten fresh or stale food.

Fresh ideas

Forget 5-a-day – hamsters should have just one small piece of fresh fruit a week (like a small piece of apple) – too much fruit is bad for them as it is high in sugar, and they can develop diabetes. Hamster-friendly veg such as broccoli can be enjoyed more often, while millet sprays make a fun and tasty occasional treat. Don't be tempted to give your hamster too much fresh food as this could cause tummy upsets.

Happy tummies

Dwarf hamsters enjoy a good quality hamster mix or nuggets. As our hamsters are fed on Pets at Home food, we recommend you do the same to prevent upset tummies from a change of diet. If

you do want to change their food, do it slowly. Introduce new foods over 10 days or so and phase out their old food completely.

Freshen up

Fresh water is a must for all animals. Check twice daily and change daily, use a suitable bottle and check it every day to ensure that water is flowing through and that the nozzle isn't blocked or leaking.

Settling in

Moving home is stressful for everyone, including small animals! When bringing your dwarf hamster home, try giving them a probiotic supplement to settle their tummy. Once they're in, keep a very close eye on them without causing any disruption, and avoid handling them until they are settled.

Let's get acquainted

Being handled doesn't come naturally to dwarf hamsters, so building a bond with your hamster will take time and patience. Start by talking quietly to your pets so they get to know your voice, but don't try to handle them for at least a day after they have arrived home. Carefully place your hand into the cage (perhaps offer a tasty treat), but don't try to pick them up right away. Let your hamster come to you in their own time and climb onto your hand. Once they get to know you, you can start to handle them carefully using cupped hands

Quiet time

To avoid causing them unnecessary stress, try to avoid waking up a sleeping hamster. This could frighten them and they may bite. They might also find it harder to trust someone who always disturbs them when they are asleep. It is best to handle your hamsters in the evening when they are naturally awake.

Out for fun

Some owners have a separate playpen outside of the cage for their hamsters to exercise in. This is a great idea, especially during the evening, when they're more active, but is only really suitable once you've got to know your hamster and their character a bit better. Make sure to put wooden or cardboard tubes, hiding places and toys in their playpen and always keep a close eye on them.

Hamsters dig exercise

Happy pets enjoy activities that come naturally to them. For your dwarf hamster, that includes hiding, chewing, exploring, digging and foraging. Tunnels and tubes make more use of the cage space and give your hamsters things to explore and places to hoard their food. Dust-free wood shavings are ideal for digging in, and a wheel can give your hamster a workout. Solid wheels

(rather than with open rungs) should be fitted securely to the side of the cage to help prevent teeny hamster feet from getting trapped.

Toilet habits

Infection (including bacterial), stress and unsuitable food can give your hamster 'wet tail' (severe diarrhoea). Take some time to observe your pets and get to know the signs of their normal health and behaviour as this will help you notice when something isn't quite right. If you notice any signs of your pet being unwell such as changes in eating, drinking and/or behaviour, or find their poo is moist or their hindquarters are dirty, you should contact your vet immediately.

A good diet and clean cage, as well as regular veterinary check-ups, will help keep your dwarf hamster healthy, but there are a few things to keep an eye out for:

Good hair and teeth

To keep your hamster's fur nice and clean, give your hamster a sand bath using small animal bathing sand. Hamsters' teeth never stop growing; so you'll need to give them something to gnaw on to keep them in good condition. We offer a great range of gnawing chews, wooden toys and blocks that will help prevent overgrown teeth and entertain your hamster too. Check your hamsters' teeth regularly and speak to your vet if you notice any problems.

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Adopting dwarf hamsters

Caring for dwarf hamsters is a big responsibility. If you think you're ready, have researched their welfare needs and you are committed to caring for them for their whole lives, why not consider giving a home to one of the rescue dwarf hamsters at our 'Pets Foundation' centre, and other animal charities.

Are they the right pet for you?

We know getting a new pet can be an exciting time, but before you commit, why not take some time to talk through these questions with your family?

Who are the hamsters for?

Hamsters are nocturnal, so may not be suitable for young children. Even if older children look after them, remember an adult will be responsible for ensuring they are cared for properly every day.

Do I have enough space?

You'll need room for a large cage, indoors and away from other pets, in a quiet place where your hamster can rest, and won't disturb light sleepers.

Can I afford dwarf hamsters?

Hamsters are not cheap pets. Consider the costs of buying food, bedding and toys on a regular basis, and paying for holiday care and vet's fees. If your hamsters fall out, you will need to separate them, so you will have to buy more cages, toys and bedding.

Do I have the time?

Feeding, cleaning, health checking and bonding with your hamster are tasks that are vital to your pet's well-being, and need to be done every day, usually in the evening when your pet is awake.

Can I commit to looking after hamsters?

The average dwarf hamster lives for around two years, but it could be longer. In that time your older children may leave home. Also, think about how often you may go away on holiday.

Who'll care for your hamster every day?

Hamsters can be wonderful pets, but they need wonderful owners too.

The five welfare needs

A good home - Your dwarf hamsters need a suitable place to live

A healthy diet - The right food for a healthy, balanced diet and fresh water on tap

Ways to stay happy - The chance to do the things dwarf hamsters like to do with somewhere to dig and things to explore

The right company - Being with, or away from, other animals

Help to be healthy - Protection against pain, injury, suffering and disease

Pets bring so much joy to children and adults alike that they soon become a much-loved part of your family. But ownership is a big responsibility. There can be unexpected vet bills, and not every pet can be insured. So, please think carefully before buying one, and make sure you can afford the potential costs involved. Not only is it the right thing to do, but under animal welfare law, you're legally obliged as an owner to give your pet any care they might need during their lifetime.

Happy Dwarf Hamster Checklist

- Large dwarf hamster cage
- Shelters for hiding and bedtime
- Dust-free wood shavings for bedding
- Shredded paper or cardboard for nesting
- Pets at Home hamster food
- Suitable fruit and veg
- Flat ceramic food bowl
- Dwarf hamster water bottle
- Bottle Brush
- Exercise Wheel
- Tubes and wooden toys
- Gnawing blocks or sticks
- Pet-safe disinfectant
- Hamster treats
- A book on hamsters
- Time in the evening for your new friend
- Local vet to register your hamster with

Pets at Home

Visit your nearest pet care centre to pick up essentials for your hamster, or you can shop online at www.petsathome.com.

The Pets Foundation

Changes do happen, and if you can no longer care for a pet you've bought from us, please get in touch so we can try to rehome them. Never abandon your pet or let them loose in the wild.