

New Hamster Checklist

Hamsters are adorable, tiny, and lovable. There are many different species of hamsters, but all are cute and make great pets. However, hamsters do have some special requirements that need to be met for them to be happy and healthy. Taking care of a hamster isn't always as straightforward as taking care of a dog or cat. Despite their popularity with parents and small children, hamsters have quite a few needs that must be filled and need a lot of equipment.

We've put together this new hamster checklist so you can rest assured that you won't forget anything your hamster needs. From supplies to the perfect care set up to vet visits, we have covered everything you need to do to keep your new hamster happy and healthy.



MUST-HAVE HAMSTER SUPPLIES

It's important to have all the supplies you'll need for your new hamster before you bring your new pet home. Here's what you should have on hand.

Cage. Your hamster is going to need somewhere safe and secure to live. There are lots of cages available; we recommend one that is made of sturdy materials, has multiple tiers, and plenty of room.

Hamster house. Hamsters are nocturnal and need a quiet place to rest and hide. A hamster house fits this bill perfectly.

Bedding. The floor of your hamster's cage should be covered by hamster-safe bedding. You can use aspen shavings, commercial bedding, or plain paper.

Nesting materials. Hamsters love to make nests, so it is important to provide them with nesting materials. Nesting wool, wood shavings, and commercial nesting materials all work.

A high-quality hamster seed mix. A seed mix is vital for keeping your hamster fed and entertained. It should contain a variety of things that your hamster will love to forage around for.

A lab block. Lab blocks are another kind of hamster food that is designed to be nutritionally dense. It is like a vitamin supplement, but for your hamster. You will need to feed your hamster a lab block on top of their regular seed mix for complete nutrition.

Water bottle. Most hamsters drink water out of a water bottle. It prevents them from making a mess or accidentally getting stuff in their water.

Water bowl. Many hamster advocates suggest having a bowl for water as well as a water bottle. This will give your hamster some freedom in choosing what water source he wants to use and decreases the chances of him running out of water.

Food bowl. We recommend having a small food bowl for your hamster. Mostly, their lab block should be left in this bowl; you can hide their seed mix around their cage or encourage foraging behaviors by having multiple bowls.

Toys. Many hamsters love exercise wheels and play balls. Supplying your hamster with these active toys will help keep them healthy.

Disinfectant. You will need to clean your hamster's cage at least weekly with a pet-safe disinfectant.

A ladder for climbing. On top of digging and nesting, hamsters love to climb. It is important to give them vertical access with a ladder or stick to climb on.

Litter scoop. To clean out dropping and uneaten food daily, you will need a litter scoop.

Untreated wood. Hamsters' teeth will continuously grow, so they must gnaw to keep them worn down. A piece of untreated wood is perfect for this.

A toothbrush. Many hamsters will need grooming, especially if they have long hair. A toothbrush often works well for this.

A portable cage. Your hamster will need to visit the vet. To make things easier and less stressful for everyone, we recommend a portable cage.

SETTING UP YOUR HAMSTER'S CAGE

Follow these steps to create an enriching habitat for your new hamster.

Decide on a suitable location. Your hamster's cage should not be placed in a busy area or next to a window or heat source. It should also be placed away from TVs and computers, as these can release high-frequency sounds that are distressing to hamsters.

Line the cage with 1 to 2 inches of bedding. You should have enough bedding to absorb your hamster's droppings and to pad the bottom of the cage.

Place your hamster's house and toys inside. Set up the cage so that your hamster feels safe and has plenty of places to hide. You should ensure that your hamster's house is in a quiet spot where he can rest undisturbed.

Fill up the water vessels. You should recheck your hamster's water bowl and bottle often and keep them full. Hamsters can become dehydrated quickly.

Place the food dish on the opposite end from the bed. Your hamster's food should not be near their bedding. Preferably, place it on the other end of the cage.

Scatter some food. Hamsters are natural foragers, so scattering some food is a great way to keep them busy. You should take into account any food scattered around the cage when calculating how much they should be eating.

Add some nesting materials. Whatever you decided to use for your nesting materials, now is the time to add them to the cage.

Regularly add and rotate toys to keep the cage stimulating. You should have a few toys on hand and rotate them in and out of the cage every week or so. This will prevent your hamster from getting bored.

TAKING YOUR HAMSTER TO THE VET

Regular veterinary care is important for any pet, and hamsters are no exception. Here's what to do to ensure your hamster receives proper veterinary care.

Find a vet with hamster experience. If you have an exotic animal vet near you, then you're in luck. If you don't, then you should call around to a few different vet clinics to find one that has some experience with hamsters.

Make an appointment as soon as possible. When you first get your hamster, you should make them an appointment to get a checkup as soon as possible. It is not uncommon for hamsters to contract something when at a pet store, so a quick visit to the vet is essential to ensure your hamster is in good health.

Think of questions before the appointment. You should make a list of questions you have about your hamster's care before your appointment. It isn't uncommon to forget your question when you get to the office, so having a list on hand can prevent you from forgetting to ask something.

Plan on regular checkups. Most hamsters should see a vet every six months to a year for a regular checkup. Talk to your vet about what they recommend and make an appointment before you leave the vet office.

Keep your hamster's health record close by. Even though hamsters don't need vaccinations, many boarding facilities still require that they have a check-up before being boarded.

Collect your vet's emergency contact information. You never know when your hamster is going to have an emergency. Get your vet's emergency contact information and keep it close at hand just in case something happens.

Ask your vet about symptoms to watch for. Hamsters are small, so it can be difficult to know when they're sick. Talk to your vet about concerning symptoms you should watch for, such as wet tail.



HANDLING YOUR HAMSTER

Your new hamster may not yet be used to human contact. These steps will help you learn how to handle your hamster with care and create a trusting bond with your new pet.

Be patient. We know the first thing you want to do with your new hamster is hold them, but it is important to be patient. Your hamster will likely be scared at first and need some time to warm up to you.

Entice your hamster with treats. Healthy treats are a wonderful way to show your hamster that you can be trusted. You should handfeed him treats when possible.

Hold him for only a short time. When your hamster begins to trust you, hold him securely close to the ground for a short period. Do not force him to stay with you for too long. If he gets uncomfortable, put him back in the cage.

Slowly increase the time. When he begins warming up to you, slowly increase the time you hold him. Your goal is to get him completely used to your company and handling.

Always hold your hamster when seated. You should never carry your hamster around or stand up while holding them. A fall from your arms can severely hurt them.

Let them roam in a safe area. Once they are used to you and do not run when you try to pick them up, you can safely let them exercise in an enclosed area that has been hamster-proofed.

Handle them daily. Once your hamster is used to you, you should get in the habit of handling them daily. Hamsters love attention, and most will enjoy being handled regularly. Handling them often will also prevent them from regressing and becoming scared of you.

GROOMING YOUR HAMSTER

Long-haired hamsters require regular grooming for a healthy skin and coat. Follow these steps to keep your hamster well-groomed.

Consider their coat length and species. Not all hamsters need groomed. Most hamsters with short hair can clean themselves, but long-haired hamsters will need groomed.

Brush your hamster. You should brush your long-haired hamster weekly or more often if they appear matted or dirty. Females will often not need to be groomed as often as males because their fur is usually shorter.

Give them a sand bath. Chinchilla sand and rabbit dust are specifically designed to help small animals stay cleaned. All you need to do is put the sand in a container that is big enough for your hamster to roll in and put it in their cage.

Hamsters are fun to raise, but there's a lot to consider before adopting a new hamster. Follow the steps in this checklist to ensure that you have everything you need to support a long and healthy life for your new pet.