

gerbil

care sheet



Gerbils are social animals with bold and curious personalities. Gerbils love to burrow and play in tubes and boxes.

facts

average adult size: 4 to 5 inches long

average life span: up to 5 years
with proper care

diet: herbivore



Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

diet

A well-balanced gerbil diet consists of:

- High-quality gerbil food and limited amounts of vegetables and fruits.
- Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water, changed daily.
- Do **not** feed chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

feeding

Things to remember when feeding your gerbil:

- Fresh food and water should always be available.
- A limited amount of vegetables and fruits can be given daily but should not exceed 10% of their total diet.
- Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.

housing

- Gerbils acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- Habitat should be glass or metal and escape-proof with solid bottom; there should be plenty of room for the gerbil to exercise and play. It is best to provide the largest habitat possible.
- 1 to 2" of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not recommended.
- Gerbils may be kept in same-sex pairs if they are raised together; otherwise, keep adult gerbils housed separately. Different types of small animals should **not** be housed together.

normal behavior and characteristics

- Social animals that enjoy the company of their pet parent.
- Thump their back feet to signal fear.
- Chew on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously; ensure they have plenty of chew sticks or mineral chews available. Gerbils are voracious chewers and should be kept in glass enclosures as they will chew through plastic cages.
- Their habitat furniture should be wood or ceramic as all furniture will be chewed thoroughly.

habitat maintenance

- Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents at least once a week with a 3% bleach solution. Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the gerbil back into the habitat.
- Remove wet spots daily; change bedding at least once a week, or more often as necessary.

grooming and hygiene

- Gerbils stay clean and rarely need baths, but can be spot-cleaned with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes if needed. Gerbils enjoy a weekly dust bath; fur may be brushed with a soft-backed brush.
- It is normal for a gerbil's teeth to be yellow; cleaning is not necessary.
- Consult with a veterinarian if a gerbil's teeth seem too long.

signs of a healthy animal

- Active, alert and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is unlabored
- Walks normally

red flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Overgrown teeth

common health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stool caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or other illness.	Consult with a veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth.	Consult with a veterinarian to have teeth trimmed regularly.
Mites	External parasites that cause gerbils to lose patches of hair.	Consult a veterinarian for treatment.
Tumors	Abnormal lumps.	Consult with a veterinarian.

If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.

shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- High-quality gerbil food
- Treats
- Bedding
- Nesting fluff
- Food bowl/water bottle
- Exercise wheel
- Hideaway place
- Toys
- Wood chews
- Mineral chews
- Dust and dust bath
- Chew tubes
- Book about gerbils

sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on gerbils and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all small animals are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, Rat Bite Fever and *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your small animal or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Go to cdc.gov/healthypets and petco.com/caresheet for more information about small animals and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to petco.com for more information.

