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PRAIRIE DOG HUSBANDRY

HOUSING

Prairie dogs may be housed in cages of wire or stainless steel. Cages of wood or plastic should be avoided as these animals are avid chewers. If a wire cage is used, a solid platform should be available to prevent foot pad trauma and infection. Ventilation is an important consideration when choosing a cage. The size of the cage should allow for normal activity and adequate spacing between sleeping, eating and litter box areas. The cage should be placed in a quiet spot in the house. Prairie dogs prefer a cool and dry environment. Do not place the cage in direct sunlight or in regions with drastic temperature fluctuations. Bedding such as Carefresh is ideal to prevent respiratory irritation and to allow digging.

DIET

In captivity, the majority of the diet should consist of unlimited timothy or other grass hays. Complete prairie dog diets (www.oxbowhay.com) should be a small portion of the diet. Only approximately 0.125 cup per prairie dog should be offered every other day. Alfalfa should be avoided due to high calcium levels and potential for development of bladder stones. Fruits and grains may be given as treats, but should not constitute more than 10% of the diet. Obesity is common in prairie dogs so exercise is also important to ensuring a good weight. Constant supervision is recommended when out of the cage. Water should be available at all times and changed daily. Most prairie dogs will learn to drink from sipper bottles.

VETERINARY CARE

Veterinary care is important in prairie dogs because they develop many problems that are related to being in captivity. Obesity, as mentioned above, is a common problem which can lead to heart disease as they get older. Odontoma is a problem with the incisor tooth roots that has multiple factors, including diet and cage chewing, contributing to its development. It is also worth noting that prairie dogs can carry diseases that can potentially infect humans. All of these problems can be prevented or treated with veterinary intervention. If you would like to schedule an appointment please contact our office at 240-687-1414.

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