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SMALL RODENT HUSBANDRY AND CARE

HOUSING

A large enclosure with a secure top is ideal for hamsters, mice and gerbils. These small mammals are talented at getting through small spaces so make sure your cage is secure and the bar width is appropriate. The cage bottom should be solid instead of wire mesh so that foot damage is minimized. Ideal bedding is a paper pulp product (like Carefresh or Yesterday's News), newspaper or computer paper. Wood shavings made out of pine, aspen or cedar can cause respiratory and skin irritation. Hiding areas such as cardboard boxes, paper towel rolls and tissue boxes should be provided because these creatures are nocturnal and need a safe spot to sleep during the day. Since they are active at night a running wheel of appropriate size should be provided for exercise. The wheel should have a solid surface to prevent injuries. Most rodents need to be housed alone to prevent fighting. This is especially true with hamsters, even if they grew up together. Gerbils are the exception and they can be housed together if they are the same sex in small groups. However, they may fight also and may need to be separated.

DIET

Rodent blocks should compose the majority of the diet because they offer the complete nutrition small rodents need for a healthy life. Seeds lack or are deficient in vitamins and minerals and provide too much fat to be considered healthy. When offered in combination with healthier foods, rodents will readily eat the seeds and leave the healthy food behind. So seeds, fruits and vegetables should be limited to treats and in small portions appropriate to the size of the animal. Timothy hay may also be offered. Animals will use the hay for nesting but will occasionally eat it and it is a good source of fiber for them. Fresh water should always be available and the water bottle/bowl should be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

VETERINARY CARE

Yearly physical exams are important in all rodent species. Many of these species only live for a few years so early preventative care is the key to having them live a long and healthy life. Veterinary care can identify and correct problems with the incisor teeth, respiratory infections, diarrhea ("wet-tail") and external parasites. "Wet tail" is a general term to describe many causes resulting in intestinal disease. Depending on the cause, it can be life threatening within 24 to 48 hours in young animals. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please call our office at 240-687-1414.

Exclusively for Birds, Reptiles and Exotic Mammals