

# Gerbils

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Gerbils are active little pets that don't require a lot of care. Because they are desert animals, they don't produce a lot of waste, so their cage only needs to be cleaned about every other week.

Gerbils are nocturnal animals, but they are sometimes awake during the day too. When awake, they are always on the move and its fun to watch them dig and burrow, play together and run on their exercise wheel.

Because gerbils are so active, it is difficult for young children to hold them, but they can be fun to watch for people of all ages.

## Feeding

The basic gerbil diet should be a fortified grain mix. You can also give gerbils small amounts of fruit and veggies and other healthy foods. Don't give too much fresh food at one time because gerbils will store the excess, which might spoil. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your gerbils and can comprise 10% of their diet. Yogurt drops are a good treat because they help prevent a small animal disease called wet tail. (see health care for more info on wet tail)

## Housing

A gerbil cage should be at least 18" X 10" X 10" high. You can use an aquarium, a large hamster cage with plastic tubes, or a wire cage with a very deep pan. Because gerbils are desert animals, too much humidity is bad for them, which is the only drawback of aquariums and plastic habitats. There should not be moisture build-up on the inside of the cage. Try to keep the humidity in the room below 50%. For bedding you should use Carefresh, recycled newspaper bedding. Do not use pine or cedar shavings since they cause respiratory infection.

## Accessories

Gerbils need a water bottle and a dry food dispenser. You can place 4" plastic tubes underneath their bedding and the gerbils will dig down to them to use them for sleeping. They need an exercise wheel, and enjoy climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

## Sanitation

Clean the water bottle weekly, scrubbing all parts. Remove all moist food that isn't immediately eaten. The cage and bedding needs to be cleaned and changed only about every 1-2 weeks.

## Maintenance

Gerbils enjoy a dust bath outside their cage once or twice a week. If you watch this amusing show you should wear a painter's mask to avoid breathing the dust.

## Health care

With proper care and diet, gerbils tend to be healthy animals. Veterinary Pet Insurance ([www.petinsurance.com](http://www.petinsurance.com)) now offers health insurance policies for gerbils. Wet tail can be a fatal disease if not prevented or treated correctly. You will notice wet tail when your gerbil starts to have diarrhea and the fur around the anus starts to turn green. Yogurt helps to prevent wet tail, while a solution called Dri-Tail helps to cure it.

## Special needs

The gerbil's tail is very delicate. Never grab the tip of a gerbil's tail because the skin will come off.

## Life cycle

Gerbils live an average of 3-4 years, although it's possible for them to live 6 years. The gestation period is 24 days and the average litter size is 4-5. Baby gerbils open their eyes at 16 days and can be weaned at 5 weeks.

## Expert Help

If you have questions about your gerbils, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a gerbil care book for more complete information. You, your veterinarian, and the staff here at the store will form the team which will be responsible for your gerbils' well-being.

## Supplies Checklist

Cage	Bath dust
Bedding	Exercise wheel
Water bottle	Climbing toys
Dry food dispenser	Chew toys
Gerbil food	Sleeping tubes
Treats	Bath house for dust baths

## Most Valuable Pets

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