



GERBILS

By Bridgette Kolas, The Humane Society for Seattle/King County

Gerbils are active rodents who are extremely curious and most active during the daytime. The average lifespan of a gerbil is two to four years. They are social animals that enjoy the company of other familiar gerbils. These small rodents are almost odorless and are relatively easy to clean and maintain. Because of their need to be handled on a daily basis and their tendency to hop and leap out of hands, gerbils may be best suited for older children or adults.

Diet

A gerbil's diet should include a daily serving of small animal diet purchased from a pet supply store that includes pellets, cracked corn, oats and seed. Small amounts of fruits and veggies add variation and provide necessary nutrients. It is also a good idea to provide your gerbil with one to two mealworms once or twice a week.

Health

Gerbils do not require any vaccinations. Gerbils that are held by the tip of the tail on a frequent basis can experience hair loss at the end of the tail this condition is called tail sloughing. Many times the hairless/skinless portion of tail will die and fall off. Hair loss on the nose and muzzle can be caused by rough objects in the gerbil's cage or by inappropriate bedding materials. This condition is called bald nose and can be treated with antibiotics and proper cleaning of the affected areas.

Housing

Gerbils need a home that provides lots of opportunity for digging. A solid bottom cage with a tray that holds LOTS of soft bedding is ideal for these little rodents, who love to dig and burrow. Plenty of room for furniture is important: make sure there is room for nesting boxes, exercise wheels and tunnels. It is also important to make sure that your gerbil's home is absolutely escape proof.

Fun Facts

Gerbils can easily chew through metal.

Gerbils communicate with each other ultrasonically.

Gerbils love to take weekly dust baths just like chinchillas.

Gerbils have a marking scent gland in the middle of their abdomen.