

## Keeping Small Pets Fact Sheet

### Chinchilla

Chinchillas are squirrel like rodents, available in 2 varieties. They are clean animals with no body odour, their thick coat means that they do not get parasites like fleas and ticks.

They should be kept in a wire cage away from sunlight and noise, plastic should not be kept in the cage as they will gnaw at anything to exercise their constantly growing teeth. Only place hard materials such as wood and pumice stone in the cage for it to chew on. Also in the cage should be some bedding (white pine shavings), sleeping quarters, some branches for climbing, a hayrack, water bottle and a dust container. As chinchillas hate water they take dry baths to remove excess oils from the fur. Dust should be available from your pet shop.

Chinchillas are vegetarians, surviving on special food pellets, hay and fresh water. They can be very frightened by noise or rough handling, and when frightened emit a pungent odour like skunks.

### Gerbil

Gerbils are intelligent, sociable animals that are best kept in pairs. They should be handled daily and they will be affectionate to you, make sure you wash your hand before handling them to avoid passing germs to them, also keep an eye on any other pets you have.

They like to keep themselves occupied in a large wire cage. This should be lined with bedding and cleaned twice a week. To keep them busy and stimulated their cage should be full of toys and challenges. They also love tubes to run through and chew on.

You will be able to find pre-mixed food for your gerbil in pet stores for a well balanced diet. This can also be supplemented with sunflower seeds, vegetables and nuts. Fresh water should be provided with daily. A sterilized bone or twig should be provided for them to chew on.

### Guinea Pig

The Guinea pig is a sociable and companionable animal and relish attention. It is a very vocal animal with several different sounds.

They should be kept indoors with a secure cage. The cage should be kept clean and change its bedding often, this will help prevent against diseases. Food pellets are available for guinea pigs, but their diet should be supplemented with fresh fruit, hay and water. Make sure that fresh food is changed daily and kept separate from the pellets. It will also appreciate chewing toys like all rodents do.

Signs of illness can include runny nose and eyes, excessive salivating, diarrhoea, skin disease and loss of appetite, they are also prone to shock and dehydration. They should also be bathed weekly, before their bath they should be groomed, long hair should be trimmed and its nails should be clipped.

## Hamster

Hamsters are busy animals that love exercise and play. A large metal cage should be used with an exercise wheel, tubes for tunnelling and clean shavings for bedding. The bedding should be changed every day to stop any smells forming. They also love to chew so wooden blocks are also a good idea to keep in the cage.

A drinking bottle should be provided, with the water changed every day, it is also best check that the ball in the water bottle works often to stop your hamster getting dehydrated.

Hamsters like a good diet, with seed bells and blends of grains. They may also like fresh vegetables and fruits.

## Rats and mice

Both rats and mice are relatively short-lived animals but provide good companionship during their lives.

They should be kept in a large cage with plenty of room. An area for them to retreat to and a place for exercise should be provided. Rats, in particular like to burrow so bedding should be plentiful. It should be changed 2 to 3 times a week. The cage should be kept in area that is well light, ventilated, away from excessive noise and stresses.

Specialist food can be bought from pet stores for your rats or mice though this can be supplemented with fresh fruit and vegetables, non-fat yoghurt and whole-wheat bread. Grass hay or hay block should always be available along with fresh water, which should be changed daily.

A general note is that small animals are expensive to treat so an early visitation to a vet is best to avoid any complications at the first sign of a problem.