

## GERBIL CARE

Gerbils (*Gerbillinae*) are naturally found in the sandy plains of Africa, Asia and the Middle East. They are small rodents that come in a variety of colours and make great pets due to their intelligence and social nature. Gerbils are generally diurnal animals (active during the day), constructing deep, dark, underground burrows. They may be easily trained if handled well from an early age. The Mongolian gerbil *Meriones unguiculatus* are the most common variety kept as pets.

**Longevity:** Gerbils may live for up to 3-4 years.

### **Sociability:**

- Gerbils are social animals, so will be happiest in a single-sex group or as a breeding pair.
- Entire (un-neutered) males may fight, so castration is recommended.

### **Environment:**

- Gerbils should be housed in a large plastic tank with good ventilation, and a deep layer of sawdust or shavings to allow burrowing behaviour. The more space provided the better!
- A nest box should also be provided as a retreat, with paper or hay bedding.
- Gerbils are very active and inquisitive animals so within the cage, wheels and toys should be provided. However, be aware that toys will be quickly destroyed, so replaceable cardboard rolls and boxes often provide the best entertainment.
- Temperature – the ideal temperature is between 16 – 21 degrees so ensure that the tank is kept out of direct sunlight as these enclosures will easily overheat.
- Humidity should not exceed 30 – 50%
- The tank should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease, especially the nest box as gerbils are prone to hoard food here.
- Sand baths should be provided for cleaning and grooming, they should never have a water bath
- Regular exercise outside the tank is recommended but this must be well-supervised to prevent injury or escape. A large enclosed 'foraging space' can be set up to provide exercise and environmental enrichment.
- Gerbils have sensitive hearing and an excellent sense of smell so should be kept away from predators and away from high traffic areas to avoid stress.



- A measured amount of gerbil-specific food – ideally a complete pellet diet is advised.
- Muesli type foods should never be fed as they promote selective feeding, which means they pick the best bits resulting in an unbalanced diet.
- Water should always be freely available via a drinking bottle and changed daily.

### **Preventative Healthcare:**

We recommend annual health checks every year for pet gerbils as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

- Gerbils become sexually mature at 10-12 weeks of age and can have 3-6 young per litter.
- Neutering is recommended if keeping male and female gerbils together, to avoid unwanted pregnancy.
- Neutering is also advised if keeping two males together to avoid fighting.
- Castrations can be performed when testicles are visible usually from 9 weeks of age.

### **Insurance:**

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide piece of mind in an accident or emergency.

### **Common Health Complaints:**

- Obesity is a big problem for pet gerbils so a restricted diet and plenty of exercise is important.
- Inflammation of the nose called facial dermatitis is common
- Continual scent marking from males housed together may lead to infection and even tumour development of the abdominal scent gland which may need to be surgically removed.
- Epilepsy is recorded in this species leading to seizures
- Diarrhoea is common especially in younger animals

