

# HAMSTERS SOUTH AFRICA



## Thinking of getting a HAMSTER?

Find out what you will need and have everything ready BEFORE you bring the hamster home!

Correct preparation is vital to ensure a happy, healthy life for your hamster.

## Already have a HAMSTER?

Are you meeting the essential requirements to keep your hamster happy and healthy?

It is never too late to make any necessary adjustments.



## BASIC CARE SHEET

\*\*\* Please refer to the HSA website regularly (information is constantly updated and added)\*\*\*

### SO YOU WANT A HAMSTER?

A hamster can be an enjoyable pet. However, it is not the same as having a cat or dog where it can run around freely or snooze on your lap. Playtimes require rest intervals back in its habitat after about 20 minutes. Young children tend to become bored with this kind of pet quite quickly, and parents must be prepared to take over the responsibility (cleaning, feeding and health) for the duration of the hamster's average two-year life span. Furthermore, the correct set-up is vital to the hamster's quality of life, so please take note of requirements and calculate your **set-up costs** BEFORE you get the hamster (please consider adopting from a critter rescue centre before buying a hamster).

**IMPORTANT:** Like cats and dogs, your hamster may require **veterinary attention** at some stage. There is a sad attitude that "it's just a hamster", and the owner is often reluctant to take it to any vet. It is important to be aware that they most certainly do feel pain and misery! Please ensure that you will be able to afford to take your hamster to an exotics vet, if necessary, and not let it suffer.

### HOW MANY HAMSTERS?

Firstly, all species of hamsters available in South Africa are ALL SOLITARY & TERRITORIAL by nature and NEED to live ALONE. Secondly, you can also NEVER introduce hamsters to each other, even during play times. In both cases, they will fight and it is often fatal! If you want more than one, you will need to get a suitable habitat for each of them.

Hamsters reach sexual maturity from 4 weeks old and therefore boys & girls have to be separated at that age.

By the time they are 8 weeks old, they each need to be in individual habitats of their own.

Please **do not consider breeding** simply because you think it'll be cute or educational for the kids to see.

Responsible breeding requires a lot of careful research, genetic knowledge, experience, dedication and space!

### GET THE CORRECT HABITAT! The bigger, the better the life!

It is very important to provide your hamster with the largest safest space you can afford.

**Plastic and wire cages sold in pet shops are in no way suitable for a hamster to live in permanently!**

Mesh/bar-type floors and ladders in wire cages are painful and harmful to little feet and MUST be covered with something solid immediately. Flexible chopping mats make good washable coverings and are easy to cut to size

**PLEASE CHECK THE HSA WEBSITE FOR DETAILS ABOUT PROPER HABITATS FOR HAMSTERS.**

**MINIMUM HABITAT SIZE requirements:** Longer housing with **UNBROKEN GROUND FLOOR SPACE** and a **low shelf** is the best & safest (e.g. purpose-built habitat, or fish tank or a DIY bin cage setup with grid top). There are quite a few good options advised on our website. Tall cages with exposed levels are not advised - they are dangerous and rarely offer the correct sized floor space. Small cages are cruel!

**SYRIAN/TEDDYBEAR HAMSTERS:** Recommended minimum = 5000-7500cm<sup>2</sup>

**DWARF HAMSTERS:** Recommended minimum = 4000-5000cm<sup>2</sup>

\* **How to calculate the size of the unbroken floor space:** Length x Width (cm) = cm<sup>2</sup>  
[Always measure at the base of the habitat. Shelves and extensions do not count].

## **HABITAT ESSENTIALS - These are MUST-HAVES and NOT OPTIONAL**

**WATER:** Bowls: should be on a level above the bedding material because water gets dirty too easily and can be tipped, causing bedding to get wet, which is unhealthy. Bottle: a good quality BPA-free hamster or mouse bottle with a metal spout. Avoid thinglass bottles and any with glass spouts – they can break and the shards will be harmful to the hamster.

**RUNNING WHEEL:** The larger the hamster, the larger the wheel required. Mini wheels are too small. Styles with open rungs, mesh, framework and cross-bars are dangerous; causing painful bumblefoot, broken limbs and other injuries (even death).

**ABSOLUTE MINIMUM WHEEL SIZES:** Dwarf – 18-30cm (7.5-12”); Syrian – 27cm-30cm (11-12”) preferably larger.

**SAND BATH:** Sand baths are vital for the hamster’s cleanliness and health. They roll in the sand to get rid of excess build-up of oil and dirt from their skin and fur. Without this, your hamster will be prone to mites and skin infections. They usually potty train themselves to urinate in the sand, which will prevent a smelly cage (see potty training tips on the website). Any hardy container from your kitchen will do (ice cream tub, Tupperware, etc.)

**SAND/LITTER:** You do not have to use expensive commercial hamster litter/sand. Plain sterilized Children’s Play Sand works just as well. NEVER use powdery/dusty or scented bath sands, or sand that has silica added. See the HSA website for details of all options.

**BEDDING:** Paper based beddings are now easily available in SA – safe, more comfortable & longer lasting.

Scented bedding and printed paper is to be avoided at all costs!!!

AVOID PINE & WOOD SHAVINGS. These are unfortunately still pushed by most pet shops, but are highly toxic to hamsters. These will cause allergic reactions and respiratory infections due to certain oils, phenols & dust that cause eye, skin, & lung infections (kiln drying does not remove all). Straw, hay, pellet bedding, fabric, etc. should also be avoided due to various risks. Hamsters like to burrow, so do put a decent depth of bedding in the habitat, and an even deeper section somewhere else. There are additional substrates that you can add as extra zones for enrichment within the enclosure.

**BEDROOM/NEST:** Do provide a little room/house for your hamster to make a cozy nest to sleep in. The plastic houses and domes available in pet shops are not very healthy, and you only need a little cardboard box with a doorway cut out and ventilation holes punched. Large cardboard tubes or special wooden chamber boxes are also favoured by many hamsters.

**NESTING MATERIAL:** Like us, hamsters like a soft warm bed. Strip up a lot of cheap 1-ply toilet paper for your hamster to drag to his chosen sleeping place (not 2-ply or facial tissues, as these can make too much dust when torn up).

AVOID FLUFFY NESTING, wool & fabric as this is incredibly dangerous - gets stuck in pouches, tangled around teeth, nails and limbs and doesn’t disintegrate, which will cause intestinal blockages ingested, resulting in illness, and even death due to infection & internal complications, and a hamster will even chew off a limb to free itself from entanglement.

**NOTE: NEVER USE ANY BEDDING, NESTING OR SAND THAT IS SCENTED, OR CONTAINS SILICA!**

**TUBES AND CHEWS:** Hamsters enjoy tunnelling. You can supply empty toilet or paper towel rolls (larger for a Syrian) for fun and exploration. They will most likely get chewed (a healthy activity) but are easy and cheap to replace. Teeth grow constantly and it is vital that they always get grinded down by gnawing and chewing. Hamsters often chew on accessible bars or mesh and you need to stop this action as quickly as possible as it poses various health issues. There are a variety of chews and gnaws available from pet shops or that you can make yourself - thick cardboard, Whimzees, seed or sekelbos sticks, etc.

**FOOD:** Please provide the best quality dry hamster mix that has the most variety - next to water, this of utmost importance for your hamster’s health and longevity. We have some excellent locally produced hamster mixes suitable for both Dwarf and Syrian hamsters, as well as a few commercial brands. Please avoid food mixes that consist mainly of sunflower seeds, mealies and pellets. A lot of detail is provided on the HSA website about the good and bad mixes.

In addition to a good dry food mix, fresh vegetables, fruits and proteins (daily or a few times a week) is absolutely essential. See the good foods list to add and provide (as well as the bad list for ingredients to avoid).

### **HABBITAT SAFETY**

- Place it in a relatively peaceful spot in the home, but not in a room where people may smoke cigarettes or have loud parties, and preferably not too near electronic equipment.
- Never place the hamster or habitat in direct sunlight or draughts, or below open windows.
- Make sure that a light-weight bin cage is safe from being knocked or pulled down by children and other pets.
- Ensure that the habitat has a heavy, secure lid that cannot be easily knocked open (by other pets or people).
- VENTILATION is extremely important. The lid should be at least 80% meshed (drilled holes, even 100, are not adequate for ventilation and airflow)





# GOOD FRESH FOODS LIST



(NB: If in doubt, don't feed it to your hamster!)

**NOTE: Dwarf Hamsters are prone to diabetes – feed fruit & high-sugar veg as treats only**

FOR MORE DETAILS ABOUT FOOD & NUTRITION, PLEASE SEE OUR 'FOOD' PAGE ON THE HSA WEBSITE.

## SAFE FRUIT & VEG

(OFFER A VARIETY EVERY 1 to 3 DAYS)

Alfalfa (only for young & pregnant hamsters),  
 Apricot, Apple (no seeds), Asparagus.  
 Baby Spinach, Baby Corn, Banana, Barley Grass, Blueberry,  
 Bean Sprouts (Mung), Blackberry leaves & fruit,  
 Broad beans, Broccoli (florets & leaves only - no thick stems),  
 Butternut (pips also make great treats).  
 Carrot, Cauliflower (florets & leaves only - no thick stems),  
 Chard/Spinach (small amount only), Cherries (not the pips),  
 Chickweed, Coriander (leaves & stems), Cornflowers,  
 Corn (baby corn, mealies), Cos Lettuce (dark tips only),  
 Courgette/Zucchini, Cranberry.  
 Dandelion flower/leaf/roots (not the milky stems/veins),  
 Dill 'leaves' (not bulb), Dates,  
 Dog Biscuits (Plain, home-baked style only – good for teeth).  
 Endive (leafy parts only).  
 Fennel 'leaves' (not bulb), Fig, **Flowers** (safe per website),  
 Flax/Linseeds - preferably crushed for better absorption and  
 mixed into wet food (good for skin & fur).  
 Green Beans, Gem Squash (pips also make great treats)  
 Hemp (seeds & leaves).

Kale, Kiwi (without seeds).  
 Loganberry, Lychee.  
 Mange Tout (snap peas/snow peas), Mango, Melon,  
 Marigold petals, Millet sprays, Mung Bean Sprouts,  
 Mealie kernels (corn) - avoid for pregnant/nursing mums  
 & baby hamsters.  
 NUTS - shelled, fresh (Sweet Almond, Brazil, Cashew,  
 Hazel, Pecan, Pistachio, Walnut).  
 Papaya, Parsnip, Patti-Pans, Peach (not the pip), Peas,  
 Pear (no seeds), Peppers (sweet/salad kind), Pet Grass,  
 Plum, Prune (not the pips), Pumpkin (pips and flesh).  
 Raspberry, Rice Cakes (unsalted - plain or multigrain),  
 Rocket leaves, Rose Petals.  
 Snap/Snow Peas (mangetouts), Strawberry,  
 Spinach/Chard (small amount of leaf part only),  
 Sprouts (Lentils, Mung bean, micro herbs).  
 Tomato (flesh only), Turnip.  
 Water Cress, Water Melon, Wheat Grass,  
 Whimzees (dog chews – can be left in the habitat).  
 Zucchini (courgette/baby marrow).

### **SAFE PROTEINS (2 or 3 x A WEEK): COOKED/STEAMED; PLAIN (NO SALT, SPICES, BUTTER, ETC.); SMALL CUBE PORTIONS.**

Beef – Lean/Extra-Lean mince (cooked, plain)  
 Chicken meat (cooked, plain), Crickets (specially bred).  
 Egg (boiled/ scrambled)  
 Fish (fresh, not tinned; bland, not very salty kinds of fish)  
 Hills Kitten Chicken Mousse tinned food  
 Hills Restorative Care (chicken) tinned food  
 Mealworms (dried or fresh 3 to 5 at a time; chop heads  
 off the live worms first - the jaws are strong and can  
 injure your hamster).  
 Royal Canin Mother & Babycat Chicken Mousse tinned  
 Shrimps (Gammarus) - small fresh water kind.  
 Silkworms (dried or fresh 3 to 5 at a time)  
 Superworms (dried or fresh 3 to 5 at a time)  
 Turkey meat (cooked, plain)

**Safe plants/herbs, wood, & flowers:**  
 Refer to the *Accessories* page on the HSA website.

### **ONCE OR TWICE A WEEK TREAT OPTIONS (one small portion at a time)**

Basil leaf, Beetroot, Bread (w/wheat toasted or not),  
 Brussels Sprouts.  
 Celery, Cornflakes (unsweetened & salt-free),  
 Cheese (preferably ricotta and low-salt cheeses, Couscous  
 (cooked, plain), Cucumber (small piece),  
 Coconut (fresh or flakes, not sweetened desiccated)  
 Coconut Milk (unsweetened; not cream).  
 Lentils (preferably cooked/or sprouted).  
 Mint leaf.  
 Oats & Barley flakes (soaked).  
 Peanut (in or out of shell). Parsley (as a tonic),  
 Pasta (pref. cooked, plain), Provita crackers,  
 Potato (FLESH ONLY; must be really well cooked).  
 Rice (brown, cooked, plain).  
 Sunflower Seeds (white, not black striped)  
 Tofu (rinsed and/or cooked) - high in fat and calcium, so only a  
 tiny piece.  
 Weetbix  
 Yogurt - tiny amount, plain unsweetened, pref. organic (in the  
 case of babies & nursing moms, a daily lick is good)



# BAD FOODS LIST



## ALL FRUIT SEEDS & PIPS

Acorns  
Alcohol  
All-Bran Flakes  
Artificial Sweeteners  
Aubergine  
Avocado  
Biltong  
Bindweed  
Bitter Almonds  
Bran  
Brinjal  
Bulbs (of any sort)  
Butter  
Citrus Fruits (lemon, orange, naartjie, etc.)  
Cabbage (particularly stems and veins)  
Cayenne  
Chilli  
Chives  
Chocolate  
Cinnamon  
Coffee and Ceylon Teas  
Coriander seeds  
Cream  
Crocus  
Currants  
Chickpeas (unless REALLY well cooked)  
Deadly Nightshade  
Dragon fruit  
Eggplant  
Elderberry leaves & branches  
Evergreen plants  
**Flowers** (see *Accessories* page on the HSA website )  
Garlic  
Grapefruit  
Grapes  
Greenies (dog chews)  
Ham  
Honey



Jam  
Jelly  
Kidney Beans (unless REALLY well cooked)  
Laurel  
Leeks  
Lemon  
Lettuce (particularly Iceberg and light green fancy)  
Lime  
Liver  
Milk  
Naartjie  
Nutmeg  
Oak  
Onion (all types)  
Olives  
Orange  
Pepper (spice)  
Pickles  
Pineapple  
Pips from fruits  
Pomegranate  
Pork  
Potato (eyes, leaves, skin, and raw pieces)  
Processed meats (ham, etc.)  
Radish  
Ragwort  
Raisins  
Rhubarb  
Salt  
Seeds from fruits  
Spices  
Sugar  
Sultanas  
Sweet Potato (unless really well-cooked, & flesh only - as a treat)  
Sweets/Candy  
Tomato seeds, green parts & flowers  
Tomato Paste (too strong and concentrated)  
Vinegar



**\*\*\*\*\*NB: IF IN DOUBT, DO NOT FEED IT TO YOUR HAMSTER! \*\*\*\*\***