

Health and welfare information about your rodent from Vetlexicon Rodent.



Miscellaneous health problems in hamsters

Two conditions of hamsters that demand special mentions are their susceptibility to bladder stones and dental problems. Therefore, these are covered in separate factsheets. However, there are other medical conditions that affect hamsters that are briefly covered here. Because hamsters are very small, nocturnal (night-active) and not closely observed, the early signs of illness are frequently overlooked or not noted at all. Hamster owners must be constantly vigilant for signs of illness and must seek immediate veterinary assistance when illness is suspected. Sick hamsters often become irritable and frequently bite.

How will I know if my hamster is ill?

They are usually reluctant to move about and walk stiffly when forced to do so. Their eyes

often look dull and sunken, and frequently have a discharge. Sick hamsters often stop eating or greatly reduce their intake of food. Consequently, weight loss is a common sign (not necessarily an easy one to recognise) of illness in hamsters.

Fluid losses from diarrhoea also may cause marked weight loss. Sudden intestinal disease (with accompanying diarrhoea) is the most common illness of hamsters, especially among those being weaned or recently weaned. If the serious accompanying dehydration is not recognised immediately and corrected with appropriate fluid therapy at the direction of a vet, death is probable.

How susceptible are hamsters to illnesses?

Hamsters tend to be affected by relatively few naturally occurring diseases. Their susceptibility, however, to a host of infectious diseases of other animals, including people, and the ease with which these diseases can be transmitted to hamsters have made them very popular laboratory animals for biomedical research.

“Teddy bear” hamsters and other genetic varieties tend to be much more susceptible to disease, and sensitive to antibiotics and other drugs, than golden hamsters.

Are hamsters susceptible to dehydration?

Potentially serious dehydration, starvation, stomach ulcers, eating of bedding material, and even cannibalism have all been reported as a result of food and/or water deprivation. This can be a result of partial or total neglect of hamsters by their owners – neglectful owners fail to provide adequate supplies of food and water for their pets and are unaware of any medical problems.

Sipper tubes often become clogged or continually contact bedding material, thereby draining the water bottles to which they are attached. Water bottles and their delivery tubes must be checked constantly for these problems.

Parents must set a “good example” for their children and teach them a routine of care and maintenance of their pet hamster. Careful observation and vigilant attention to their

hamster's every need should be emphasised.

Neglect to any degree is intolerable and always results in some detriment to the hamsters.

Are hamsters prone to abscesses?

Abscesses are most often caused by bite wounds from fighting. These wounds become infected, forming abscesses that appear as firm, painful lumps under the skin. Abscesses from injuries other than bite wounds may be indistinguishable from those that result from fighting.

Abscesses of one or both cheek pouches are also very common among pet hamsters. These commonly result from penetrating wounds to the lining of the pouch caused by harsh foods or bedding materials. It may be very difficult for you to know whether a swelling in the area of the cheek pouch is an abscess or simply food or bedding being temporarily stored within the pouch.

Generally speaking, the swelling resulting from a cheek pouch abscess persists, but a pouch swelling from stored food or bedding disappears when the animal empties its cheek pouch. If an abscess is detected or suspected, the abscess must be opened and the pus drained or removed by your vet.

An appropriate antibiotic also will be prescribed. Furthermore, the underlying cause(s) for the abscess must be eliminated, if possible.