



FREE GUIDE

Hamster care basics

Frolicy's third guide beyond dogs and cats

Introduction

A 2024 survey of 46 European veterinary professionals, published via the University of Bristol, identified small housing as the single most impactful welfare issue for hamsters — ahead of diet and handling. This guide covers what genuinely matters, grounded in that research and RSPCA guidance, starting with the one thing most starter cages get wrong.

The cage size most starter kits fall short of

RSPCA, Blue Cross, and PDSA all converge on the same minimum: at least 100cm by 50cm of floor space for any hamster species. The 2024 veterinary welfare survey independently arrived at the identical figure, flagging cages smaller than this as the top-scoring welfare concern for hamsters overall — ahead of diet and handling combined. Many popular starter cages sold specifically for hamsters fall well short of this.

Bedding: the mistake with real physical risk

Fluffy, cotton-wool-style bedding is a genuine hazard, not just a lesser choice — the thin strands can wrap around limbs, cutting off circulation and leading to amputation in serious cases. A safe, paper-based or aspen bedding, provided at real depth (RSPCA-cited research points to around 40cm for golden hamsters), lets them dig and burrow naturally, which measurably lowers stress.

- Paper-based or aspen bedding — never fluffy 'cotton wool' style nesting material
- Real depth for digging and burrowing, not a thin layer
- A dark, enclosed nesting spot within the cage
- A solid-surface wheel sized for the species (no wire-rung wheels)
- Kept indoors — hamsters can enter a dangerous hibernation-like torpor if too cold

Company: the opposite advice from rabbits and guinea pigs

Unlike rabbits and guinea pigs, most hamsters are solitary by nature. Syrian hamsters in particular should always be housed alone — they aren't naturally social and will fight if housed together. Some dwarf hamster species can coexist in same-sex pairs or trios if grouped from a young age and the group stays stable, but per RSPCA guidance, even these species don't need company to be happy the way rabbits and guinea pigs do. Knowing which type you have matters before assuming 'a friend would be nice.'

A few more details that catch new owners off guard

Hamsters are highly sensitive to high-frequency sound, so housing them away from anything that generates ultrasound (some electronics) reduces stress. They also do best with a predictable light schedule — lights going off at roughly the same time each night — since they're

nocturnal and a chaotic light schedule disrupts their natural rhythm.

Hamster care checklist

- ☐ Cage floor space of at least 100cm x 50cm, not a typical small starter cage
- ☐ Safe bedding (paper-based or aspen), never fluffy cotton-wool-style material
- ☐ Real bedding depth for natural digging, not a thin layer
- ☐ Know whether your hamster's species is solitary (most Syrians) or can tolerate company (some dwarfs) before assuming they need a friend
- ☐ Kept indoors, away from ultrasound-generating electronics
- ☐ A predictable, consistent light schedule

Summary

Housing is the single most impactful welfare issue for hamsters according to a 2024 veterinary survey — getting the cage size, bedding, and species-appropriate company right does more for a hamster's wellbeing than almost anything else an owner can do.

This guide is for general education only and is not a substitute for advice from a certified trainer, veterinarian, or veterinary behaviorist. If you're seeing signs of distress, aggression, or a sudden change in behavior, please consult a professional who can assess your pet directly.