

# The McPet Shop

## GERBIL

### General Information

Gerbils are curious and friendly little animals. They are hardy, undemanding, clean and have very little odour. Gerbils seldom, if ever, bite and only when startled or frightened. Most species of gerbil are native to the desert and semi-desert areas of Mongolia and north-eastern China. Shaw's jird is in the same family as the Mongolian gerbil but originates from the dry areas of North Africa and the Middle East living in deep burrows in the sand.

### Housing

In the wild, gerbils live in complex sand burrows. They are sociable and are happiest kept in groups. It is best to keep single sex groups from the same litter as pets. Males may fight on occasion even if they are littermates, but if the accommodation is large, this will not be such a problem. The most natural form is a gerbilarium, a large, covered tank just like Gerbil City in The McPet Shop made from 3-4 foot fish tanks. Gerbils will chew through wood, so a large glass or plastic tank is best. If you keep gerbils in a cage, a large nest box is needed for privacy, as the gerbil will be unable to burrow. Gerbils enjoy tubes and tunnels such as the Rotastak systems. Remember a large accommodation is better as it is less stressful for your pet, the minimum floor space required is 750 cm<sup>2</sup> per gerbil. Wood shavings can be used in a gerbilarium and on cage floors, however peat moss or chopped straw 10cm thick makes the best bedding. Accommodation must be away from draughts and sunlight.

### Exercise

Exercise is important and the environment can be made interesting to encourage it. A thick layer of burrowing material provides the best exercise, hollow plastic tubes and wheels add to this. Wheels must have solid walls or gerbils will get their tails caught. Do not leave a gerbil with a wheel all day, as it will over exercise - 20 minutes at a time is enough. Supervised exercise outside the cage will allow your pet to explore further.

### Handling

A new gerbil will be nervous, so once you have prepared the cage or gerbilarium leave your pet alone for 24 hours to settle in. Over handling causes stress which can be fatal. When you feel your pet has acclimatised introduce your hand slowly allowing them to sniff and accept your presence. Gently stroke your gerbil talking all the time. Slowly increase your contact, but do not expect too much too soon, once your pet is confident they can be picked up. Before picking up always check it is awake (it may bite if startled). To pick up, hold the tail base with one hand and grip the body with the other; always hold your pet close to your body. Do not lift a gerbil by the tail, the skin will come away.

### Feeding

Water should be available at all times in drinking bottles, as an adult requires between 4 and 10 ml per day, add a vitamin supplement at least once a week. In the wild, a gerbil's diet consists of seeds, grains, roots, leaves and stems. A balanced commercial gerbil food is best as too high a protein or oil level can lead to skin and other medical problems. Feed 20g daily to each adult and remove the excess to avoid stale food. You can supplement commercial diets with a little fresh fruit and vegetables with a little egg, cheese and milk powder, but do this slowly to avoid diarrhoea. Ensure that your gerbil is not fed too many sunflower seeds or peanuts. Gerbils love to chew, so provide plenty of wooden chews to keep the teeth healthy.

### Gerbil Health

Gerbils are infrequently affected by disease, however, their housing and environment can have dramatic effects of their health, and the majority of diseases are stress-related. If you allow your gerbil to eat too many sunflower seeds, obesity and bone fractures will occur. Be careful as gerbils

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will selectively feed from some mixes. A gerbil's teeth grow throughout life. If your pet is off its food or drooling saliva, have the teeth checked by a vet. If your gerbil loses their appetite, some body weight, has runny eyes or nose, develops diarrhoea or has a poor coat or skin; seek veterinary advice.

### Your Health and Hygiene

Gerbils are clean animals, however, it is important to wash your hands before (so you do not frighten your pet with unusual smells) and after handling your gerbil (to prevent the spread of infection). Clean your pet's living area daily and the whole cage and sleeping area once a week. Gerbilariums can be left for up to three weeks but remove soiled areas and uneaten food every day. Disinfect with a gerbil friendly product.

### Key Gerbil Facts

Weaning	3-4 weeks	Puberty	10 -14 weeks
Gestation	24-26 days	Litter Size	Average of 4 to 6
Adult Weight	50-60g	Life expectancy	3 to 5 years

This Care leaflet is a basic guide only. More information is available from pet care books or the The McPet Shop guide available in the store.

### Guarantee

The McPet Shop does not guarantee the age or sex of any animal, bird or fish sold. All livestock is guaranteed for 48 hours from the time of sale. The McPet Shop aims to supply completely healthy pets. If a problem occurs within this period, then please contact the store.

### *CHECK – Tick the box as you complete your task*

#### Housing



- A large **tank** or **gerbilarium**, consider the number of gerbils to be kept
- **Bedding** material for the living floor (shavings) or the gerbilarium
- **Bedding** for the sleeping box
- **Disinfectant** to keep the cage hygienic

#### Exercise



- A **wheel** with solid sides to stop the tail getting trapped
- Small bore **tubes** to play in

#### Feeding



- **Food** – A gerbil food. Continuity is important ask our associates what we have been feeding.
- Food **bowl** and water **bottle**
- **Disinfectant** for feeding dishes
- **Chews**/wooden block to help maintain dental hygiene.

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## **GERBIL**

Knowledge €

- **Books** to improve your pet knowledge.