

Female Gerbils With Bites Under Eye

Why do two of five female gerbils housed together get bites under their eyes?

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Q: I have five adult female gerbils of three different generations — one old one, three medium ones and one young one. They are all very close in age though. I know it is bad to have more than two adult female gerbils housed together, but I didn't have a choice.

Yesterday I discovered that the youngest gerbil had what looked like a big bite under her eye. Tonight, I discovered that one of the medium-aged gerbils had a big bite under her eye. All of my gerbils are still sleeping and snuggling together, I even saw the two bitten ones grooming each other. I have no idea what could have happened. The other three gerbils don't have a scratch on them, not yet anyway. What should I do? Should I separate them? I love my gerbils so much, and it is very hard to see them get hurt.

A: Gerbils do best living in pairs. Some gerbils are OK in trios. The more gerbils you have in the clan, the more likely you will be to have two that don't get along, especially as the youngest ones come into maturity. Females can de-clan violently, so you are lucky to be getting early warning signals.

I suggest you split them into a pair and a trio now. The one that you feel is the most aggressive should go with one not involved in the scuffle. The other three should stay in the trio. When more than two gerbils live together, make sure they have a lot of food, always have water, and have cardboard to chew, deep litter and other interesting things in the tank like a sand bath and timothy hay. They should have only one house or other place to sleep so they don't set up separate territories.

It is very easy to set up inexpensive gerbil housing. Necessary supplies include a 4-ounce water bottle and guard, wire mesh lid, mesh wire wheel to hang from the top, a nest box, and a 10 or 20 gallon tank. You can also get shelving that will fit perfectly a 15 gallon tank on the top and a 10 gallon on each lower shelf.

See more gerbil expert questions and answers.