

## Hedgehog Hisses, Stays In Ball And Can't Walk Well

**What can be done to get a hissing, hiding hedgehog to interact with its owners and to walk better?**

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**Q:** My family recently bought a hedgehog, our first, and we can't seem to get her to come out of her little ball. She hisses a lot when we go to touch her, and lately she doesn't seem like she can walk. What do you recommend we do?

**A:** It sounds like you are dealing with two separate issues — socialization and health.

Socialization is very important in hedgehogs. Hedgehogs need to be held by humans before they are weaned to be more relaxed around humans. If your hedgehog came to you unsocialized, you can still win her over, but it will take some time.

Hedgehogs are nervous by nature. They are very scent-oriented, so to help your hedgehog recognize your scent, place one of your T-shirts in her nest box, but make sure it doesn't have loose threads. Also, wash your hands before picking her up to remove any scent of food, hand creams or other substances.

Your hedgehog needs to know she can trust you. To build trust, carefully pick her up a few times a day and let her sit in your hand or, if she's really nervous, on your lap. Be sure to have her favorite treats (e.g., dried crickets, mealworms) on hand when you take her out, and only give them to her during these sessions so that she has positive associations with the experience.

With time and patience, your hedgehog will overcome her fear of humans and enjoy her time out with you. Even well-socialized hedgehogs may huff and ball up when awakened, but only for a few seconds before they start exploring and relaxing their quills. If you can get to that point, you have come a long way in socializing your hedgehog.

As for why your hedgehog is having trouble walking, this can be due to a number of medical problems, including Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (WHS), a progressive, degenerative, neurological disease. Consult with a veterinarian knowledgeable about hedgehog care.

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