

Abscess On Hamster's Cheek Pouch

What to do when a hamster develops a lump on its cheek pouches.

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Q: I have a feeling that my 8-week-old Syrian hamster has developed an abscess on one of her cheek pouches. Everything I have read about hamster abscesses says to take the hamster to the vet to have the abscess lanced and drained. First, how do I go about finding a vet that will have experience dealing with hamsters? And second, do you have any idea what a procedure like that would cost? I'm really worried!

A: Hamsters develop large lumps near their cheek pouches for a couple of reasons. The most common reason is that they are storing food there. And they may store items they think are food but are really not, like bedding. In those cases, you or your veterinarian needs to remove those unfood-like items. That is a simple procedure to do. Another reason for the lump is what you suggested, an abscess. Most times, the abscess does need to be drained and your hamster is placed on antibiotics. That is usually the only way to treat these infections or abscesses.

In rare cases, an abscess resolves on its own but, more commonly, an untreated abscess only gets worse. The bacteria associated with the abscess may get into the bloodstream and your hamster might die. It is usually a simple procedure to lance and drain the abscess, and the antibiotics must be given for at least a week.

Finally, in older hamsters, we also worry about cancer but that would be very rare in this case since your hamster is so young.

In terms of how to find a doctor who knows about hamsters, that is not easy. If you obtained your hamster from a pet store, you can call and ask for recommendations. Some pet stores have a relationship with a veterinarian and that usually means the veterinarian is familiar with small mammal problems. If they do not have a recommended list or if you did not get your hamster from a pet store, you will have to find one on your own. [Hamster breeders or shelters/rescues might also have a recommendation for a hamster-savvy veterinarian. – Eds.] Call the local veterinary hospitals and ask if they see hamsters. If they do ask them how they would treat a condition such as what your hamster has – that will be a very revealing answer. Or do a search online for doctors in your area – those that see small mammals will say so and may have information on the care of hamsters.

The cost of the procedure really depends on what is wrong with your hamster. But you have every right to ask the approximate cost or estimate before anything is done to your hamster.

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