

Hamster's Illness Has Owner At Wits' End

A hamster's fatigue and loss of appetite fail to point to a specific illness.

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Q: I am confused by what is happening to my son's hamster. Out of the blue, she has become inactive — doesn't eat, doesn't drink, just sleeps and has fewer droppings than normal that are red in color. She keeps trying to find different places to sleep and has now dug underneath the bedding so we can't even see her.

I have taken her to the veterinarian. I didn't feel the vet was very interested. He gave us some antibiotics to put in her water.

My son is very upset and I am not sure what to do. His Syrian hamster, Peach, is about 1½ years old. She was a very active hamster when we got her. Please give me any advice you can about my hamster's condition. Do hamsters hibernate? If so, are these the signs?

A: It sounds as though your son's hamster is sick. I am sorry that the visit to the veterinarian did not help her. It sounds like your veterinarian was trying to rule out an infection by treating her with antibiotics in the water. Unfortunately, your hamster did not respond to this treatment. Therefore, a simple infection is probably not the cause of her problem.

The lack of appetite and fatigue are non-specific signs of a problem. These do not tell us exactly what is wrong. The red color of the droppings could be caused by bleeding in the intestines or could be coming from the urinary or genital tract. At 1½ years of age, she is getting up there in years. She could have any condition we commonly see in older hamsters. This includes heart disease or cancer. You need to return to the veterinarian's office or solicit a second opinion. Either way, some diagnostic tests will be necessary to know exactly what is happening to your son's hamster.