

Caring For A Runt Of The Gerbil Litter

The runt of the litter may thrive with special attention.

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Q: My two gerbils had seven babies. They are now about 5 weeks old. One of the babies is much smaller than the other ones. I recently noticed that he is less active, as well. He is always alone in the cage, and he is never with the rest of the gerbils. I took him aside and tried and get him to eat, and as soon as I brought food to him he ate it quickly. He did the same with the water I brought him. To me it seems like he is not eating or the others aren't letting him eat. I don't know what's going on with the little guy. Should I be concerned?

A: This gerbil is probably what is better known as a "runt" of the litter. Any pup that is not growing as fast as its littermates, won't eat or drink, or appears sickly, is known as a runt. Sometimes there is a medical reason that Mom is not feeding a pup and sometimes it is nothing more than competition for food - and this guy has lost out. If this guy is just losing out due to competition, feeding and giving him water may be enough for him to catch up developmentally to his littermates. Unless you want to take him to a veterinarian, there is not much you can do to figure out what is going on with this little guy. If there is a medical reason for this condition, he may not improve with all of the treatment you can give him. But if it is just competition, then he'll thrive with the special attention you are giving him.