

Hamster Behaviors Revealed

Be familiar with hamster behavior and know how to prevent bites.

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Hamsters bite. That said, hamsters usually bite only when they're stressed or frightened. Biting can be prevented by handling hamsters gently and at appropriate times. For instance, hamsters don't like to be grabbed unexpectedly, and they don't like to be wakened in the middle of the day when they're trying to sleep. Dwarf hamsters, however, are less prone to biting than Syrian hamsters.

To prevent biting, start by providing a hamster with a clean, comfortable environment. A hamster that has a nice living area will be happy, not anxious. Clean its cage regularly and provide plenty of food, water and toys. If you've been eating, wash your hands before you reach for your hamster. Otherwise, it may think your fingers are food.

Environmental features that can affect a hamster are noise and light. During the day when a hamster is sleeping, place its cage in a quiet area that's not exposed to direct sunlight. Too much noise and light during the day can make a hamster crabby and more likely to bite.

When Hamsters Bite

Be prepared for a hamster to bite you at some point, and react calmly. Hamster bites hurt, but do your best not to screech or shake your hand in an attempt to get the hamster to loosen its grip. You could frighten or accidentally hurt it. Instead, gently grasp the hamster with your other hand and try to remove it.

If necessary, you can wear gloves to pick up your hamster, but this is only a temporary solution. Being picked up by a gloved hand is just as stressful to a hamster as being picked up by a bare hand. The gloves also mask your scent, which means the hamster doesn't get an opportunity to become accustomed to the way you smell, which would make it less fearful of you.

If your hamster bites another hamster, it's probably best to separate them. Many hamsters prefer to live alone. Syrian hamsters must have their own cages.

Other Hamster Behaviors

Other normal hamster behaviors include chewing, running and exploring, and grooming. Hamsters love to chew and will nibble on toys, pieces of wood, cage bars or anything else that looks chewable. Chewing is essential for hamsters because it prevents their teeth from growing too long. To keep a hamster gnawing happily, provide it with a variety of chew toys. Change the toys frequently so the hamster doesn't get bored.

In the wild, hamsters spend their days running and exploring, in a constant search for food. They can run long distances, and just because they're living in a cage doesn't mean they don't still have the instinct to run. Exercise wheels, tunnels and ladders help them meet their need for activity.

Grooming is another natural hamster behavior. It's not unusual for healthy hamsters to spend quite a bit of their day cleaning their fur. If a hamster stops grooming itself for more than a day, be concerned that something is wrong with it and take it to the veterinarian.

Hamsters also instinctively store food. They hide it away in their bedding, in different places in their cage and, of course, in their cheek pouches. It's important to clean stored food out of the cage regularly so it doesn't go bad and make the hamster sick when it eats the food.

Finally, many hamsters are solitary animals. They'd rather live alone than with another hamster, although some dwarf hamster species will get along in same-sex pairs. And even if a hamster is tame and enjoys being handled by people, it needs some down time to remain comfortable. A hamster loves nothing more than to burrow into a tunnel or huddle in a small, dark, enclosed space.

Accommodate a hamster's need for privacy by providing it with a few hidey-holes – boxes that it can enter and curl up in



for a nice nap. Empty tissue boxes or oatmeal boxes work well for this purpose, or you can purchase ready-made items made of wood, plastic or ceramic. Any such hideaway gives a hamster a feeling of security, thus reducing stress. When a hamster is in its tunnel or other hiding place, leave it be unless you suspect there is a health problem.