

## Basic Hamster Diet

**Learn how to keep your hamster's cheek pouches healthy.**

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A hamster will stuff its cheeks with just about anything, but it needs to eat a balanced diet to thrive. Hamsters are omnivores. That means they eat a variety of foods, from seeds, fruits and greens to the occasional insect or other form of protein.

Commercial hamster foods, available at pet supply stores, can come in the form of pellets, mixes that contain seeds (high amounts of sunflower seeds can cause obesity or nutritional deficiencies), grains such as oats and barley, cracked corn and pellets, or blocks. Pelleted foods with 18 to 22 percent protein contain all the nutrients a hamster needs, but some hamsters dislike them. Seed mixes are often better received, but be sure the mix contains a variety of foods, such as dried vegetables and fruits, not just seed. Mixes with high amounts of sunflower seeds can cause obesity or nutritional deficiencies, so they should be avoided. Blocks meet the hamster's desire to chew and help keep the teeth trimmed. Often, hamster foods are formulated according to species, so be sure to choose the one that's right for your particular hamster.

For a truly complete diet, hamsters should also receive small amounts of fresh foods. Healthy foods for hamsters include small amounts of sunflower seeds and nuts, carrots, celery, lettuce and spinach. Alfalfa pellets are another good addition to a hamster's diet.

The four food groups a hamster needs are grains, greens, vegetables and fruits. To ensure a hamster eats a balanced diet every day, provide it with a tablespoon of commercial food; a few clean leaves of lettuce, spinach or dandelion greens; a small, thin slice of apple (except for dwarf hamster species), a small and a broccoli or cauliflower floret. In total, a hamster can be expected to eat about 12 grams of food daily.

Feed a hamster at dusk, after it wakes up. Place the food dish in an area away from where the hamster sleeps and eliminates. Add a little more commercial mix throughout the day so it always has something to nibble on. Be sure to keep the food dish clean, and remove old food from the cage so it doesn't spoil. Hamsters like to cache food to snack on later, so check inside hidey-holes and underneath bedding.