

In The Know On Hamster Toys

Provide toys and exercise equipment for your hamster.

By Audrey Pavia

A solid-floored exercise wheel allows a hamster to run for as long as it likes. Courtesy Angela Ruby, MD

Hamsters are active little critters that need lots of exercise every day. You can't take them for a walk or let them run around the house, but you can provide them with toys and an environment that meets their exercise needs.

They love to play with toys they can chew, climb, run in or run through. Lots of toys meet their needs: tubes, tunnels, exercise wheels or runabouts, branches or blocks of untreated wood that they can climb or chew on, and even bedding for burrowing.

An exercise wheel is one of the best ways to let a hamster run for as long as it likes. Look for one with a solid bottom so tiny paws won't get caught in crevices. One that mounts on the side of the cage with no cross supports helps keep the neck or a leg from getting caught.

Tunnels, too, should be made without gaps or cracks that could snag a hamster's toe. Be sure to choose one that's large enough. It's not uncommon for Syrian hamsters in particular to grow too large for their tunnels and get stuck in them. The safest tunnels and hidey holes are those with no bottom. If the hamster gets stuck, the tunnel or den can be flipped off by the hamster or lifted off by you. You can purchase tunnels or make them out of paper towel or toilet paper rolls or empty oatmeal boxes with the bottom cut out.

Runabouts, or exercise balls, are a great way to let your hamster play outside its cage. Secure the door with a little tape so it doesn't accidentally pop open while the hamster is playing. Use the exercise ball in a safe area with no stairs.

Hamsters enjoy climbing and appreciate having access to ladders or branches. Attach them securely to the cage so the hamster doesn't run the risk of falling. Safe woods are those made from hard woods such as aspen and oak, or thoroughly dried branches from fruit trees such as apple or cherry.

Avoid toys that hang by a string instead of a chain. Chewing and swallowing the string could cause intestinal problems.

It's important to rotate toys and give hamsters options so they don't get bored. Providing them with a variety of accessories sharpens their creativity and benefits them by providing not just a hideaway but also a place to rest or make a toy of.