

Common Hedgehog Health Issues

Learn about common hedgehog ailments.

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Obesity

Hedgehogs that are overfed and don't get enough exercise can develop obesity. You can tell your hedgehog is overweight because it will have excess flesh under its stomach that may hang down. An obese hedgehog may also have trouble walking and running. To prevent obesity, don't feed your hedgehog more than 4 tablespoons of commercial hedgehog food or dry cat food per day. Keep fruit treats to a minimum as well.

Mites

Hedgehogs are prone to skin mites and ear mites. Skin mites can cause itching and irritation to the skin. Ear mites can cause ear irritation and a foul-smelling discharge inside the hedgehog's ears. Your veterinarian must diagnose and treat both skin and ear mites. Help prevent these problems by quarantining any new hedgehogs that come into your home for at least two weeks to make sure they don't have skin or ear mites.

Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome

A neurological condition called Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (WHS) affects domestic hedgehogs. Signs of this disease are chronic, progressive paralysis that ultimately renders the hedgehog unable to walk. Signs usually show up in the hindquarters first, and the hedgehog wobbles when it walks. This disease can strike a hedgehog of any age, and may be genetic.

Take your hedgehog to an exotics veterinarian if you suspect WHS. Other illnesses such as nutritional deficiencies, strokes, tumors, bacterial infections and injuries may also have similar signs; only a veterinarian can make a definitive diagnosis.

Veterinarians do not have a cure for WHS. If you buy a hedgehog, make sure you purchase it from a reputable breeder who only breeds healthy hedgehogs.

Eye Troubles

Hedgehogs have protruding eyes that are susceptible to injury and irritation. Signs of eye irritation including holding the eye shut, pawing at the eye or tearing. The eye may be irritated by dust or another foreign object, or it might be hurting because of a scratch or eye infection. Your vet must diagnose the problem. To prevent eye issues, keep your hedgehog's cage clean and free of sharp objects that may scratch its eyes.

Respiratory Infection

Hedgehogs can easily develop respiratory infections. Bacterial infections such as pneumonia are common in hedgehogs. A hedgehog with a respiratory infection may have a runny or crusty nose and eyes, and may have raspy breathing or coughing. If left untreated, the infection may result in lethargy and loss of appetite. Hedgehogs can die from untreated respiratory infections.

Your veterinarian can diagnose and treat your hedgehog's respiratory infection. To help keep your hedgehog from developing the problem in the first place, isolate new hedgehogs for at least two weeks so you know they are healthy before you introduce them to your resident hedgehogs. Keep your small pet's cage clean, and make sure it's not exposed to drafts.