Hamsters are clean and captivating companion animals that are best kept individually. Hamsters are known as hoarders because they have cheek pouches that they use to store and move food from one place to another.

Average Adult Size 4 to 5 inches
Average Life Span 2 to 3 years with proper care
Diet omnivores

Feeding
Fresh food and water should always be available.

* Feed high quality grains, seed, vegetables, fruits, Timothy hay as well as lab blocks if available. Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.
* Clean, fresh, chlorine free water.

DO NOT FEED chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

DO NOT USE SPRAYS OF ANY KIND AROUND HAMSTERS including insecticides and air fresheners.

Housing
* Hamsters acclimate well to average household temperatures not to exceed 80 F degrees; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
* Habitat should be plastic, metal or glass with an escape-proof solid bottom; there should be plenty of room for the hamster to exercise and play. Make sure to provide a hamster wheel and provide the largest habitat possible.
* One to two inches of bedding should be placed in the habitat and should consist of high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not to be used.
* House adult hamsters separately. Female hamsters usually get along if housed together from an early age.
Normal behavior and interaction
* Hamsters are nocturnal so expect them to play during the night and rest during the day although they will adjust to your schedule.
* Easy to handle but may nip if suddenly awakened from a nap or startled.
* Chew on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously so ensure they have plenty of chew sticks and/or mineral chews.
* Solitary. Never house more than one adult male hamster per habitat and be cautious when attempting to house females together.

Habitat maintenance
* Remove wet urine spots daily. Change bedding weekly or more often, if necessary. Clean the habitat and its contents once a week with mild soap and water; rinse and allow to dry completely before placing hamster back into the habitat. Make sure to remove and secure your hamster when cleaning the habitat; a good safe, escape-proof place is a dry bath tub!

Grooming and hygiene
* Hamsters stay clean and do not need baths; they can be spot cleaned with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes if needed.
* Consult with a veterinarian if a hamster’s teeth or nails seem too long.
* Because all hamsters are potential carriers of infectious diseases, always wash your hands before and after handling your hamster and/or the habitat contents to help prevent the potential of spread of diseases.
* Pregnant women and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing and/or caring for a hamster and should consider not having a hamster as a pet.

Signs of a healthy animal
* Eats and drinks regularly
* Active, alert and responsive
* Healthy, clean fur and clear eyes
* Breathes clearly and walks normally

Red Flags
If you notice any of these signs, please contact your exotic animal veterinarian:
* Weight loss, Abnormal hair loss, Diarrhea or dirty bottom, Distressed breathing, Lethargy, Skin lesions, Overgrown teeth

Common Health Issues - symptoms or causes requiring an exotic animal veterinarian
Diabetes - symptoms - frequent urination and lethargy
Diarrhea - symptoms - loose stools caused by poor diet, stress, parasites, unclean housing
Malocclusion - overgrown teeth
Mites - external parasite that causes hamsters to lose patches of hair
Wet Tail - lethargy, loss of appetite, excessively watery diarrhea, dehydration, dull sunken eyes, irritability, hunched posture while sitting or walking, abdominal discomfort, protruding rectum from constant straining, blood in stool or around anus, high odor.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Hamsters are susceptible to the human cold; do not handle your hamster if you are sick.