

## Pocket Pets Study Guide

### **Hamsters**

Hamsters sleep during the day and are often active at night. They may bite if startled and can escape and disappear easily. Hamsters are very calm if handled frequently and gently. They have very little cage odor. Males are often more gentle than females. They eat commercial hamster food. For adults, only one tablespoon of food is required a day. Hamsters can also be fed small amounts of lettuce, carrots, celery and other vegetables. Keep hamsters in cages with clean, dry bedding such as shredded paper, cedar shavings or any other absorbent materials. A metal cage with a removable bottom works well. An upstairs platform with an exercise wheel is a must. The corner of the cage where the hamster urinates needs to be cleaned daily and the entire cage needs washed with soap and water once a week.

### **Lizards**

Lizards are cold blooded. Their body temperature is influenced by the temperature in their environment. Lizards need a terrarium with a cover. Size of the terrarium depends on size of the lizard. Ventilation is important. Diet depends on species. Some lizards are herbivores while others are omnivores. Lizards use their tongues for drinking and cleaning their mouths after they eat. They also use their tongues for smelling. The quick darting of the lizard's tongue is like the excited sniffing of a dog.

### **Gerbils**

Gerbils are small, active, inquisitive rodents originating in the dry regions of Asia and Africa. They consume little food, require minimum space, are hardy, have little odor, are prolific breeders and rarely, if ever, bite. Gerbils need a good home that is spacious, escape proof, easy to clean and loaded with useful items such as a wheel fitted to the side of the cage, a nesting box, plastic tubes for tunneling and wood shavings or shredded papers for floor covering. They are vegetarians that prefer a diet of cereal, grains and seeds, with fruit or vegetables on occasion. A block of wood or some green twigs to chew on are appreciated. Presently there are 13 different colors of gerbils: agouti, argente, black, lilac, sapphire, dove, white, honey, nutmeg, slate, polar fox, Burmese, and Siamese. Fur patterns are spotted, pied, mottled and heavy mottled.

### **Cavies (Guinea Pigs)**

The guinea pig is not a pig and does not come from Guinea. A cavy is a rodent related to the porcupine. They originally come from South America where they live wild in the mountains of Chile. They are affectionate, social animals that prefer to be kept in pairs. Types of breeds include American, Abyssinian, Peruvian, White Crested, Teddy, and Silkie. Cavies prefer a clean, safe, dry cage in a well-ventilated but not drafty area with a temperature between 60 and 80 degrees F. At least one to two square feet of floor area is recommended. Bedding must be clean, nontoxic, absorbent, relatively dust-free and easy to replace. Pine shavings are the most common bedding used. A hiding place should be included. A cavy's diet should include commercial pellets and a source of vitamin C such as small amounts of orange pulp, parsley or lettuce. Too much grass or greens can give guinea pigs diarrhea. Fresh, clean water must be readily available at all times. A piece of wood, preferably soft pine, should be placed in the cage. Regular grooming and dental care needs to be given. When carrying or transporting your cavy, support should be provided from beneath. Slide your hand under its body, palm up and gently lift it with its chest and front legs resting on your wrist.

## **Snakes**

Terrariums are excellent homes for snakes. Be sure the top or lid can be locked to prevent escape. Make hiding places of bark, stone or pieces of plastic pipe. Keep the temperature at 75-80 degrees F and provide about 2 hours of sunlight a day. Keep the snake's cage or terrarium clean and provide fresh water each day. A snake likes to catch its food live and swallow it whole. Feed it one or two live frogs or mice each week depending on the snake's size. A snake uses its forked tongue to pick up scent particles. These particles are applied by the tip of the tongue to the sacs of the Jacobson's organs that are connected to the olfactory nerves and send a message to the brain telling the snake of the presence of prey, of danger, of water, or of a mate.

## **Turtles**

A 10-gallon or larger aquarium that includes both water and land areas plus available short periods of direct sunlight with shade available is ideal. Temperatures of about 75-85 degrees F are best for most turtles. Turtles are omnivores (both meat and plant eaters). They do not have teeth so food should be cut into pieces the turtle can swallow. Turtles like meat, canned dog or cat food, lettuce, fruit bits and leafy vegetables. Vitamin A and D are needed to prevent pneumonia, depression and swollen joints. Provide fresh water daily. Always wash hands thoroughly after handling a turtle. Turtles can carry a bacterium called salmonella that can make people sick. Turtles are easygoing and the most common ones are pond sliders, box and painted turtles. Turtles are long lived animals. Records show that some can live up to 100 years of age.

## **Mice**

Mice are friendly little creatures that seldom bite. They can live 2 to 3 years. Mice colors include fawn, sable, white cinnamon, blue, black and brown. A minimum cage size of 16" x 12" x 9" with a cover and no openings greater than 5/16". It must be well ventilated, provide opportunity for exercise and be kept at a stable 64-68 degrees F. Mice prefer starchy foods like seeds, grains and rice. They also enjoy bread, crackers, carrots, apples, grapes and raisins. Fresh water must always be provided.

A rodents teeth (rats, mice, hamsters, cavies) will continue to grow throughout its life. These pets should be given hard objects to chew on.

## **Hermit Crabs**

Hermit crabs are social animals. In the wild they live in large groups. "Hermit" refers to their living alone in a shell. They are not aggressive and climb extremely well. The hermit crabs search for a perfect shell is endless. It is important to provide your crab with a variety of shells. The hermit crab will molt its exoskeleton (or body shell) every 12-15 months. It should be left alone during this time. Hermit crabs are "decapods", they have 10 legs. The front pair is different from each other. The larger has a pincher used for defense and climbing and the smaller is used for eating and climbing. The next 4 legs are used to hold the crab in its shell and never extend outside the shell. Hermit crabs are omnivores. Commercial food is available and can be supplemented with bread, crackers, lettuce, apples, oatmeal, cornmeal, and bologna. Always provide fresh water. Aquarium tanks work well for housing. Sand or gravel for the bottom is the best. Make sure to include climbing objects, various shells and cover to keep your crabs active and content.

## **Hedgehogs**

Hedgehogs have developed habits and physical features of different types of animals. For defense a hedgehog has spines like a porcupine and curls up into a tight ball like an armadillo. Hedgehogs are territorial and do best living alone. Its home should be kept between 65-90 degrees F. If it's any colder than 65, the animal will go into hibernation. Hedgehogs are clean animals so providing them with a litter box in their pen will make it easier to clean up after them. They prefer a sleeping area that is private and dark. A PVC pipe with a 4" diameter works well. The pipe should be cut 10-12" in length with a cap at one end and braced so it doesn't roll around. Hedgehogs are insectivores. Their diet could include live food such as meal worms, crickets, grasshoppers and small frogs. Provide fresh water daily.

## **Ferrets**

Ferrets are intelligent animals that can be trained to walk on a leash and can be litter trained. Their intelligence has been compared to that of dogs. They are gentle, social animals with playful personalities. A ferret will live between 8-12 years old. They like dark, tight spaces for sleeping. They need space for stretching and moving. A cage should be a minimum of 3 feet in length and 2 feet in height. They will use a litter box just like a cat. Ferrets are carnivores. They need high protein diets. High grade dry and canned kitten and cat food is best. Have fresh water available at all times. Ferrets need distemper and sometimes rabies shots. They are susceptible to human colds and a wide range of canine and feline diseases including distemper, feline leukemia and heartworm. Ferrets have scent glands that give off a musky odor. These can be surgically removed, which is often done at the time of spaying and neutering. The ferret is a member of the weasel family

## **Chinchillas**

Chinchillas are an attractive, fun animal from South America. They enjoy cleaning themselves in a dust bath (of finely ground clay), are very clean and like guinea pigs, have very little odor. Chinchillas are vegetarians. They do tend to be quite nervous and unpredictable and do not enjoy being handled. These characteristics plus the relatively high cost of purchasing chinchillas usually make them a poor pet for children.

## **Vital Signs**

Normal temperature: birds 105-110 degrees F, rodents 102-104 degrees F

Normal pulse rate: guinea pigs 240-280 beats/minute, birds 300 beats/minute, hamsters 450 beats/minute

Respiration rate: guinea pigs 60-90 breaths per minute, birds 12-110 breaths per minute, hamster 74 breaths per minute.

## **Plants**

Common household plants such as English Ivy, Elephant Ear, Philodendron and Azaleas are poisonous and harmful to your pet if eaten. Safe plants include Spider Plant, Swedish Ivy and Dracaena.

6/24/22