

Children's favourite pet – The hamster

Hamsters usually live for up to two years. There are three main types of hamster – Syrian (golden), Chinese and Russian.

Hamsters are nocturnal, which means they sleep during the day and come out to play at night. They need peace and quiet when they're sleeping.

Hamster house

Your hamster will spend most of its life in a cage so its home should be as large and interesting as possible. They need a large cage kept in a warm place indoors and out of direct sunlight. In the wild, hamsters burrow and live underground, so make sure the cage has lots of bedding material such as sawdust and shredded paper (but not newspaper or magazines as the ink can be poisonous), and enough room to sleep and hoard food. You should clean out the cage thoroughly at least once a week and refill with food and water daily.

Healthy diet

Hamsters need a diet of mixed seeds, grains and nuts. They also love fresh fruit and vegetables such as apples and carrots, which will keep their teeth clean as well. **Attention! Rhubarb, potato and tomato leaves are all poisonous for your hamster!**

Keeping busy

Hamsters are very active animals and need lots of exercise – usually at night when you want to sleep. Make sure your hamster has plenty of toys to keep it occupied and happy. You can use an exercise wheel but make sure it is a solid one and not with open rungs, which can trap your pet's feet while it's spinning around. You can also make a "hamster's adventure playground" out of cardboard tubes, ramps and wooden cotton reels.

Most hamsters like being let out of their cage to exercise but don't forget they're very quick and if left unattended they will be out through the door before you know it.

(Source: RSPCA's Animal Action, Dec/Jan 2003)

TRUE or FALSE – Check whether you remember what you've read about hamsters.

	<i>True</i>	<i>False</i>
1. Hamsters live up to two years.	€	€
2. The Chinese hamster is also called golden.	€	€
3. Hamsters usually play during the day and sleep at night.	€	€
4. A hamster's cage must be kept in a warm place indoors.	€	€
5. Hamsters need large cages with enough space for sleeping.	€	€
6. In the wild, hamsters live on high trees.	€	€
7. Water must be refilled every day.	€	€
8. The diet of hamsters should be based on meat.	€	€
9. Lots of toys are needed to keep hamsters active.	€	€
10. Hamsters never want to leave their cages.	€	€