

# Caring for Diabetic Dwarf Hamsters

Adapted from information from the Honey Hams Yahoo group:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HoneyHams>

Common in dwarf hamsters, diabetes is characterized by above-normal blood glucose levels. The body turns food into glucose, or sugar, to use as energy. The pancreas, an organ near the stomach, makes a hormone called insulin to help glucose get into cells. In a diabetic, the body either doesn't make enough insulin or can't use its own insulin as well as it should. This causes sugar to build up in the blood.

Diabetes isn't a death sentence. If you pay special attention to diet, your ham can have normal readings and live a long, healthy life—some diabetics have lived three years! Always think positive!

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## Symptoms

- Increased thirst; excessive drinking
- Excessive peeing; strong-smelling urine with either a sweetish or acetone (nail polish remover) smell
- Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Tiredness (sleeping more than usual) or excessive exercise, or a combination of both
- Irritability (only in some); unusual biting when the ham didn't bite before
- Increased hunger

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## Testing

Small Angels recommends testing your dwarf hamster's urine to confirm the presence and type of diabetes. To test the urine, follow these steps:

- Purchase Bayer Keto-Diastix (tests for ketones and blood glucose).
- Place hammy in clear plastic carrier with no bedding and wait for the hamster to pee, then dip the test strip into fresh urine.
- Compare results to chart on Keto-Diastix package.
- Read package insert for more information to prevent false readings.

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## Diet

Diet is key to controlling diabetes in dwarf hamsters. **Supreme Hazel Hamster** is recommended because of its high protein content and the fact that it doesn't contain molasses (which you'll find in Hartz, Nutriphase, and

Kaytee). But pick out the corn, smashed corn, and smashed pea pieces in the mix, which are the pieces in the bottom row of the picture at right.



Dwarf hamsters need a high-protein food item every day. The following are good **protein sources**:

- Boiled chicken breast or turkey
- Chicken baby food (with broth; unseasoned)
- Egg whites with tiny bit of cooked egg yolk, boiled, scrambled, or fried in small amount of olive oil
- Flax seed
- Low-fat cheeses (not processed)
- Low-fat plain yogurt
- Roasted soybeans, unsalted
- Spirulina and/or nori seaweed (roasted laver; no salt or salt removed)
- Tofu (firm or medium firm is best)
- Tuna in water, drained (not all hams like this)

Dwarf hamsters also need **fresh vegetables** every day. Choose a variety from the following list:

- Beans (except red kidney)
- Bitter melon
- Bok choy
- Broccoli
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Chinese broccoli
- Cucumber
- Green pepper
- Kale
- Legumes
- Red pepper
- Mushroom (1/4 teaspoon, every other day)
- Romaine lettuce

**Whole grain foods** are also beneficial as they help deliver glucose to the cells, and other foods carry other benefits for diabetics. Choose a variety from the following list:

- Cooked brown rice
- Cooked whole grain or buckwheat pasta
- Nutritional yeast
- Weetabix or any nonsugar whole grain cereal
- Wheatgerm
- Whole wheat bread

Offer the following foods only **in moderation**:

- Nuts
- Pepitas
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sunflower seeds

**Avoid** the following foods:

- Brussel sprouts
- Carrots (high in natural sugars)
- Corn
- Fruit of any kind (high in natural sugars)
- Garlic
- Onions
- Parsley
- Potatoes
- Raisins
- Red kidney beans
- Sprouts
- Sugars (maltose, dextrose, fructose, etc.—look for these ingredients in commercial foods and treats)
- White rice
- White bread

These lists are by no means comprehensive. If you're not sure about a food item, post a question to the Honey Hams Yahoo group.

If you've tested your hamster's urine, the following guidelines will help you tailor the hamster's diet to his or her specific condition:

### **High Ketones, High Glucose**

Treat with a hypoglycemic such as fenugreek seeds or fenugreek powder—up to 400 mg or 25 seeds is safe. Use a 50/50 Pedialyte/water solution in the water bottle. Follow a high protein, high fiber, low fat diet.

### **High Ketones, Low or No Glucose**

Treat with a 50/50 Pedialyte/water solution and high protein, high fiber, low fat diet.

### **No Ketones, High Glucose**

Treat with only hypoglycemics, plain water (no Pedialyte), and absolutely NO SUGAR (dextrose, maltose, corn, etc.). High protein, low fat, high fiber diet. Hypoglycemics include fenugreek (easiest to obtain), glipizide (requires a prescription), buckwheat (comes in pasta, whole, or flour form; doesn't work as well as the other hypoglycemics), spirulina (doesn't work as well as the other hypoglycemics; very expensive), nori (roasted laver seaweed), and mushrooms (1/4 teaspoon, every other day).



*Chinchillas, gerbils, guinea pigs,  
hamsters, mice, and rats looking for homes*

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