Small Angels Rescue Hamster Care Packet

Recommended Supplies:

- **Suitable Housing**: Tall enough for the wheel, at least 360 square inches of floor space, bigger is better; secure, well-ventilated. The maximum bar spacing should be ½ inch for Syrian hamsters and 1 cm for dwarf hamsters. We recommend the Prevue Pet Products 528 Universal Small Animal Home, the Lixit Animal Care Savic Hamster Heaven Metro Cage and the Lixit Animal Care Savic Mickey 2 Mice and Swarf Hamster Cage, X-Large. Aquariums must be at least a 30-gallon breeder. DIY bin cages are a good, inexpensive option.

- **Bedding**: We recommend Carefresh Bedding, Kaytee Clean and Cozy unscented paper bedding and All Living Things unscented paper bedding. Unscented Aspen is acceptable. No Cedar, pine, chlorophyll, sawdust or cat litter.

- **Water Bottle**: Four ounce minimum. Use water dish with caution.

- **Water Bottle Holder**: for aquariums

- **Small Food Bowl**: We recommend ceramic.

- **Quality Food**: We recommend mixing Higgins Sunburst Gourmet Hamster and Gerbil Food, which is available at Petsmart, Petco and online mixed with either Envigo (previously Harland Teklad) 2018, Envigo 8604, or Envigo 2014. Hartz, Nutriphase, and Kaytee not recommended.

- **Tupperware Container**: To store unused food to prevent spoilage.

- **Nesting Box**: Hide-away, Igloo, Small Box...

- **Nesting Material**: We recommend unscented toilet paper. Do not buy the commercial “fluff” As it is dangerous to their health and can cause a stomach blockage or loss of blood supply to limbs.

- **Exercise Wheel**: It must be solid - NO rungs or spaces. The Dwarf hamsters need a minimum 6-inch wheel such as the Regular Silent spinner or Large Comfort wheel. Syrian hamsters need a minimum 9-inch wheel, such as the Wodent Wheel, Large Comfort Wheel, Giant Silent spinner. The Carolina Storm Express Wheel 10.3” diameter is another good option for any hamster and its handmade. [http://carolinastormhedgehogs.com/thecarolina-storm-wheel.html](http://carolinastormhedgehogs.com/thecarolina-storm-wheel.html)
• **Rubbermaid Tub Playpen**: Inexpensive large tubs are available at Walmart, Target etc.

• **Toys**: Tunnels, Tubes, Items to Explore...

• **Carrier**: Medium wire small animal carrier recommended

### About Hamsters

There are more than 20 species of hamsters in the wild, but only a few have been domesticated. Syrian or the Classic Golden hamsters (*Mesocricetus auratus*) are usually about 6 to 8 inches long and weigh 3 to 5 ounces. They are colorblind and see their surroundings in black and white. They come in many colors. One variety is the long-haired.

The Campbell’s Russian dwarf hamster (*Phodopus campbelli*) is about 2 to 3 inches long, 1 to 2 ounces, and round and fuzzy with plentiful fur on his tail and feet. The Winter White Russian hamster (*Phodopus sungorus*) is similar but a bit smaller and turns white in winter. The dwarf has delicate feet, a soft coat, compact physique and a dorsal stripe running down his back. Both are susceptible to diabetes.

Other species are Chinese (*Cricetulus griseus*) and Roborovski hamsters (*Phodopus roborovskii*)— variations on the dwarf hamster. Chinese hamsters are susceptible to diabetes. All dwarf hamsters are energetic compared to Syrian hamsters.

Golden or Syrian hamsters are solitary animals. If kept together, they will fight, sometimes to the death. Even though pet stores often house Syrians together, this is a harmful situation for the animals. It leads to competition, aggressiveness, unsanitary conditions, and, in the case of mistaken sexing, babies. Dwarf hamsters, on the other hand, can be kept together. They are able to be kept in same gender pairs if they have been together since birth. Many dwarf hamsters are usually separated either early on or later in life due to fighting or aggression of one sibling. Dwarf hamster owners should have an extra set of supplies on hand in case immediate separation is needed.

Chinese dwarf hamsters are solitary similar to Syrian hamsters.

### Notes about hamsters

• Hamsters are nocturnal—they sleep during the day and are active at night.

• Although they are very small, hamsters can travel long distances. Wild hamsters can travel 5 to 12 miles in one night searching for food. They can run fast and jump.

• The female Syrian hamster is typically larger than the male.

• A hamster’s lifespan is around 1,000 days or two to three years.
• Syrian hamsters must live alone or they will fight, sometimes even to the death. Campbell dwarf hamsters and Roborovski dwarf hamsters can live in pairs if they are raised together though not all dwarf hamsters can live together, many end up needing to be separated.

• Teeth chattering means your hamster is upset and should be left alone for a while.

• Hamsters have good hearing. They’ll stand to listen closely to an interesting sound.

• Hamsters have a keen sense of smell. They use it, along with their whiskers, to navigate.

• Hamsters have poor eyesight. They don’t realize how high up they are when on a sofa, bed, or other high surface, and they may walk right off, so it’s important to always keep an eye on your hammy.

Preparing for your hamster

Before you bring home your new hamster, you’ll want to get everything ready for her so that when she arrives you can simply place her in her new home. In this section we’ll discuss what you’ll need to purchase for your hamster and how to get your home ready for her.

CAGES

Your hamster is going to spend most of her time in her house. It should be safe, comfortable, roomy, and interesting. Provide your hamster with the largest home possible. In the wild, a hamster burrow has many rooms and can be several feet underground. The domesticated hamster similarly prefers large spaces but must live indoors as he will not know how to survive in the elements. If the cage is too small, your hamster may become protective and nippy. They may also chew on the bars, climb up the side or monkey bar across the top if the cage is too small out of boredom and stress.

Your hamster will enjoy a home with many cubbies and tunnels. These can be made using common household products, such as paper towel and toilet paper rolls. The cage should be full of different types of toys, rotate toys to keep life interesting.

There are dozens of kinds of hamster cages sold at pet stores and online, but be aware that most of them are not suitable for hamster habitats. A cage box may promise the cage is roomy, safe and fun, but don’t take the box at its word.

Please see the Small Angels Rescue Guide to Buying a Hamster Cage for more information on suitable cages, along with photos, price ranges, places where you can find them, and modifications to make to each cage to make them safe hammy habitats.
Your hamster’s cage should be kept away from direct sunlight. Heat and exposure to direct sun can be extremely harmful to your hamster’s health. Remember that sunlight changes during the day, so a shady spot in the morning might be a sunny spot in the afternoon. The cage should be away from loud noises such as televisions or stereos. The cage should be in a well-ventilated area away from drafts and vents. Drafts can contribute to respiratory problems. The ideal draft-free temperature for hamsters is anywhere from 65 to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. They are creatures of the desert yet prefer the same temperatures as humans. Most don’t know that hamsters can go into hibernation if the temperature gets too low, for domesticated species of hamster’s hibernation is fatal for them. If you suspect your hamster is attempting hibernation immediately provide skin to skin contact to warm them up, placing them under your shirt on your stomach or chest is best, then take them to the vet ASAP for observation and possible IV fluids and oxygen. Keep the cage away from cords, cleaning solvents, chemical agents, and other household pets.

**BEDDING**

Once you’ve selected a cage, it’s time to select bedding to place in the cage. Your hamster will need bedding to absorb urine and provide a comfortable place to rest. Place 3 – 5 inches of bedding on the bottom of the cage. Clean your hamster’s entire home every 3 -4 weeks to allow them to keep their scent throughout the cage. Your hamster will usually/typically go to the bathroom in the same spot. You can clean their potty corner every day or two with a spoon—add a little fresh bedding. Also be sure to remove stored food every few days so that it does not become moldy.

Many of the bedding types sold at pet stores are harmful to hamsters’ health and should never be used. Consult the following chart for information on different types of bedding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Bedding</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small Pet Select Bedding</td>
<td>Preferred bedding; large amount; good price; holds burrows well; not dusty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CareFRESH and CareFRESH ultra</td>
<td>Preferred bedding; made from recycled newspaper; gentle on hamsters’ respiratory systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaytee Clean and Cozy unscented paper bedding</td>
<td>Preferred bedding; not dusty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Living Things unscented paper bedding</td>
<td>Suitable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspen</td>
<td>Use only if those above are unavailable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cedar/Corn cob/Cat litter/Pine</td>
<td>Do not use: can cause infections/allergies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OTHER CAGE ACCESSORIES**

**Water Bottle:** Use a 4-oz. minimum hanging water bottle and change the water daily. Use only water bottles that have a ball bearing. Holders are available to fix the bottle to the side of an aquarium. If your hamster goes without water for long, she faces the risk of dehydration. Also, water bottles mimic how
hamsters drink in the wild—by drinking drops of dew hanging from plants. When you fill the water bottle each day, run your finger over the tip of the sipping tube to make sure that water is coming out and it is working. If not, it is time to purchase a new bottle. A water dish can be used but must be used with caution. Ensure the water dish is sturdy and secure to minimize risk of spilling. Check the bowl daily for spills and your hamster for wetness. If the bowl spills even once or gets your hamster wet switch to a bottle. You should provide fresh, cold water daily.

**Food Dish:** Provide your hamster with a small ceramic food dish. Make sure your hamster can reach the bottom of her bowl. You may want to purchase a second bowl to offer fresh food in so you are able to remove the fresh food easily to guarantee it does not get moldy. Your hamster may prefer for their food to be scattered throughout their cage. This is a good option for overweight or bored hamsters but this may make it hard to monitor your hamster’s food intake.

**Sleeping House:** Your hamster will choose a dedicated sleeping area or possibly multiple. Where he chooses to sleep, he may make a nest out of his bedding by building the bedding up into a ring and sleeping in the middle. Your hamster would like a little something to go over his head when he is sleeping. A variety of nesting boxes are available at pet stores. You can also make your own by cutting a door out of an old tissue box. The best hideaways give the hamster an accessible door opening and plenty of privacy.

**Nesting Material:** Your hamster would also like some material other than his bedding to build his nest. Toilet paper is a popular choice. It must be undyed and unscented. Seventh Generation toilet paper is safe and sold at most grocery stores. Toilet paper should be added at least every cage clean. It can be placed in their sleeping house of throughout their cage for a fun activity. Do not buy the fluffy bedding material sold in pet stores. As this can block hamsters’ stomachs causing death or wrap around their limbs resulting in lost circulation and amputation.

**Sand Bath:** A sand bath can be provided by placing a suitable sized dish in the cage filled with sand, either reptisand (quartz sand only) or play sand can be used; play sand will need to be baked. Kaytee Granule bedding can be used as well for some Syrians but dwarf hamsters usually prefer sand. Use either ceramic or metal dishes which are not easily tipped. Hamsters, particularly dwarf hamsters, appreciate having a dish of sand to roll in, and this helps to remove the greasiness from the coat. Never use chinchilla sand or dust.

**Litter box:** Yes, hamsters can be trained to use a litter box. A corner litter box or a repurposed low dish can be used as a litter box; fill with their bedding, sand or kaytee soft granules; place in area where they go potty or place soiled bedding in litter box to train them.

**TOYS**

Hamsters are active, playful animals. However, they can do much more than just run in their wheels and should be given the opportunity to do so! Without regular exercise their spines can deteriorate and they
can become paralyzed. Here are some examples of toys that will contribute to your hamster’s happiness.

**Exercise Wheels:** Many pet stores sell wire exercise wheels that are inappropriate for hamsters. Some are even sold as part of a cage. The wheel should be made from one solid plastic piece. It should not have metal or plastic rungs that can cause the hamster to fall through and become stuck. There is no way for you to monitor your hamster constantly and he may become stuck in his wheel for hours overnight unbeknownst to you. He could break his legs or injure them to the point that they require amputation. A properly sized wheel will not cause your hamsters back to bend at all.

Some excellent exercise wheels are the Large Kaytee Comfort Wheel and Giant Silent Spinner Wheel sold online at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and PetSmart.com. Other great wheels are the Carolina Storm Express Wheel, Carolina Storm Bucket Wheel, and the Wodent Wheel, which in our experience are much quieter than the Comfort Wheel. Wodent Wheels are available at [www.petdiscounters.com](http://www.petdiscounters.com) and Amazon.com. *Carolina Storm Express and Bucket Wheels are available at [www.carolinastormhedgehogs.com](http://www.carolinastormhedgehogs.com).* Either of these wheels are fine for Syrian hamsters, who need a minimum 9-inch diameter wheel so they can fit inside comfortably.

Any of the wheels mentioned will work for dwarf hamsters but they can also use smaller wheels such as the Medium Comfort Wheel or the Regular Silent Spinner wheel.

**Exercise Ball:** We do not recommend exercise balls unless they are clear and not colored, are of the correct size for the species of hamster and are used with strict, constant supervision in a hamster-proofed area. Hamsters have poor eyesight and tend to crash into things when they are in them so should not be used near stairs or other animals such as dogs and cats. They may need to be manually steered away from walls and obstacles. There is also the chance their feet will get caught in the ventilation holes. Since there is little ventilation, you can only leave them in the balls for 15 minutes or fewer at a time. That’s not enough time for enough exercise and playtime out of the cage to keep your hamster healthy and happy. A wheel and play area should be a hamster’s main source of exercise. We recommend 6-9” size clear exercise ball for a dwarf hamster and 11-13” size for a Syrian hamster.

**Rubbermaid Playpen:** A better option than the exercise ball is to make a playpen out of a Rubbermaid tub. The tub should be at least the size of the cage, and clear colored is best. Alternative options to tub playpens are kiddie pools, or pop up fabric play pens like ball pits (not the best option for chewers)

Put down a layer of bedding and toys such as tubes and building blocks. Hide treats throughout the playpen. You can even transfer your hamster’s food dish to the playpen and you should provide a small dish of water. The playpen is a great way to break the boredom of the cage where the hamster spends all of her time. Toys can be rotated to make life interesting. The advantages of the playpen are that it is lightweight, easy to clean, and easy to move around. It is fun for your hamster and expands her environment beyond her cage, and if you frequently change it around, she will always have something new and interesting to explore.
It is not recommended that you purchase the collapsible wire playpens available at pet stores. Hamsters are intelligent and quickly find their way out of these simply by climbing up the sides.

**Other Toys:** There are many toys sold at pet stores for hamsters. Natural wood toys are best. Hamsters also enjoy tunnels made from pipes, toilet paper tubes, fabric, or plastic. They also enjoy toys that hide a treat, this provides a fun activity that is challenging to your hamster which prevents boredom.

**Chewing:** Place a toilet paper tube or paper towel tube in your hamster’s cage. They will nibble on it and tunnel through it. This will satisfy their chewing instincts and help keep their teeth trimmed. Wood toys can also be used, they should be as natural as possible. Monitor wood toys for splinters and remove promptly if splinters develop. Whimzee dog treats are a great option to give your hamster to chew.

**HANDLING**

Hamsters navigate through their world relying on their senses of smell and hearing. During your first few days together, your hamster will have to become acquainted with your voice and scent. Speak softly when you approach her. Keep your interactions to a minimum for the first 24 hours. She needs to adjust to her new house.

When you feel your hamster is ready, gently reach into her cage from the side of the cage with your hand in her eyesight, inviting her to come over and sniff your skin. Do not reach in from the top and immediately touch your hamster, this will startle them. Make sure you have washed your hands first. Otherwise your hamster might mistake you for lunch! It is best to approach her in the evening when she is starting to wake up.

If your hamster rolls on her back, bares her teeth, runs away, or squeals, she is feeling threatened. Because in their natural desert habitat they are prey animals, hamsters do not bite unless they feel frightened. Leave her alone for a while.

But if she approaches you, attempt to pet her or wrap your fingers gently but firmly around her and lift her up. You can also turn over a plastic igloo, coax her to walk into it, and then lift the igloo out of the cage.

Your hamster will want to walk from hand to hand. Hold your hamster gently between your palm and thumb. Turn the palm of your other hand face up and allow her to step there. Continue to alternate your hands, placing one in front of the other.

On those occasions when it is necessary to wake your hamster, do not startle her or she will become defensive. Instead, tap your finger on the side of her cage or make a little noise until she wakes on her own. Let her sniff your hand so she realizes you are there. Talk to her and stroke her a few times gently, until she gets up and walks around. Only then should you slowly and gently pick her up. The hamster’s
personality is often misunderstood—they are frequently labeled as mean and ornery. In most instances, the hamster who lives up to those labels is simply a hamster that has been mistreated or was never socialized to human handling. The well-bred, well-socialized hamster that is properly housed, entertained, and cared for should be a gentle, sweet-natured animal that comes to know and trust her owner and to enjoy the time they spend together. The bond that can form between a hamster and a human can be surprisingly meaningful!

DAILY FEEDING
In this section, we’ll examine what hamster’s need to eat on a regular basis. The information in this section refers to feeding guidelines for Syrian hamsters. Because some dwarf hamster species are susceptible to diabetes, their feeding guidelines are different and are contained in the diabetes sheet given to prospective dwarf hamster guardians.

FEEDING

- Purchase a quality food; a seed mix and lab block are necessary. Nutritional levels should be 8-15% fiber, 15-24% protein (17-20% being ideal) and 4-7% fat. It should be as natural as possible. (It should not have purple and hot pink colored bits in it.) Most hamster foods on the market promise that they are nutritious, healthy, and chock full of vitamins and minerals. However, most of these same foods are high in fatty seed content and also contain sugar and molasses, in addition to the controversial, cancer-causing preservative ethoxyquin.

- We recommend Higgins Sunburst Gourmet Hamster and Gerbil Food Mix which is available at Petsmart and Petco and most online stores. Among the brands to avoid are Nutriphase, Kaytee Forti-Diet, Kaytee Exact Rainbow Food, Oxbow, and Vitakraft.

- For lab blocks, we recommend Envigo (previously Harlan Tekland) 2018, 2014 or 8604. Envigo 2018 is usually the best option. There are other lab blocks such as Mazuri or Prolab, but these should be used only for specific species.

- Store the unused food in an airtight Tupperware container so it does not become moldy or stale. Food that is not fresh can make your hamster sick. It is not necessary to keep the food in the refrigerator.

- Give your hamster fresh food every day. Dump out any uneaten food and refill the bowl. Ensure to monitor how much food your hamster is eating. The best time to feed your hamster is the early evening, when she’d naturally be looking for food. Check your hamster’s stash every couple of days to make certain it is not moldy and to see how much you hamster is eating.

- Hamsters need and enjoy fruits and vegetables. A great place to offer fruits and vegetables is in his playpen (see toys section above). You do not want your hamster to hoard fresh food in his
house. It can spoil. If they eat spoiled food, it can make them sick. Remove leftovers immediately.

• As with humans, dark green, leafy vegetables are nutritionally best. Vegetables that are suitable to feed your hamster are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alfalfa</th>
<th>Green beans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Kale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
<td>Mango</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>Melon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil</td>
<td>Mint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>Okara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broccoli</td>
<td>Papaya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrots</td>
<td>Parsley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cauliflower</td>
<td>Peach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat grass</td>
<td>Peas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherries, without stones</td>
<td>Plums, without stones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chestnuts</td>
<td>Raspberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken, boiled, unseasoned</td>
<td>Spinach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cilantro</td>
<td>Squash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cranberries</td>
<td>Strawberries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandelion leaves, purchased from store</td>
<td>Sweet peppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandelion leaves, purchased from store</td>
<td>Sweet peppers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A more extensive detailed list can be found here.

• Your hamster will enjoy these seeds, grains, and nuts daily to supplement their food. Though their seed mix and lab block should be the majority of their diet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amaranth</th>
<th>Oats- whole</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barley</td>
<td>Quinoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown Rice</td>
<td>Rye Berries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buckwheat</td>
<td>Spelt/Spelt Berries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgur</td>
<td>Spelt Pasta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamut</td>
<td>Vegetable Pasta (I.e. spinach, beet, carrot)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashi</td>
<td>Wheat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>Wheat Berries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oat Groats</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• These seeds, grains, and nuts can be given in small amounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chia Seeds</th>
<th>Nuts* (Almonds, Pistachios, Walnut)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coconut (raw, dried, shredded)</td>
<td>Pumpkin seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flax seeds</td>
<td>Rose Hips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gohi berries</td>
<td>Sesame Seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemp Seed Nut</td>
<td>Sunflower seeds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Nuts should be raw, not salted or roasted. We do not recommend peanuts.

• **DON'T FEED:** Foods that are poisonous to hamsters are as follows:
• **IN SMALL AMOUNTS:** The following foods can cause liver problems and should only be fed occasionally in small amounts:

- Onion
- Rhubarb
- Garlic
- Potato
- Green part of tomatoes
- Leak
- Raw beans
- Leaves from tomatoes
- Spicy food
- Citrus fruits
- Sweets
- Junk food

• **SPECIAL TREATS:** From time to time, about once every week or two weeks, your hamster will appreciate a special treat in his food bowl. Suitable treats are:

- Rolled oats
- Dry miniature corn cobs
- Cheese or unsalted, unroasted nuts in small quantities
- Whole grains: whole wheat bread; cooked brown rice or whole wheat pasta
- Tofu
- No sugar cereals (such as Kashi or cheerios)

*Mineral and salt wheels are sold in pet stores but are **not** recommended because there is a danger that too much can cause dehydration.

**HEALTH**

As discussed in the section on handling, your hamster needs exercise each and every day. A good time to check your hamster over for health problems is when you bring her out every day. Look for listlessness, runny eyes or nose, sneezing, wheezing, rattling, thin condition, ruffled stand-up coat, hunched posture, diarrhea, bloated belly, cuts, open wounds, and growths. Check her teeth using a q-tip or popsicle stick to make sure they have not become chipped or fallen out (common in older hamsters especially). Look at her nails as well to make certain her nails are not overgrown. If they are either try to cut them yourself with baby nail clippers or schedule a vet appointment. Also check her weight routinely using a kitchen scale. A healthy hamster will be curious and active, have a sleek, glossy coat, and be in good body weight. If your hamster should develop medical problems it is your responsibility as her guardian to take her to the vet—just as you would your child.

A healthy hamster has bright, shiny eyes, a thick, silky coat, a clean tail and rear end, and a dry nose. She will be lively and alert. On rare occasions, hamsters can catch an illness from humans.

Signs that your hamster is sick:
lack of energy
overgrown teeth
bald spot
overgrown claws
weight loss
avoidance of light
runny stool (poop)

excessive scratching
dirty, wet fur around the tail
swollen, red patches of skin
runny nose red or runny eyes
loss of appetite
swollen cheeks

As soon as you notice any signs of illness, take your hamster to a vet. Because small animals are prey in the wild, they have an instinct to mask signs of illness. Once you’ve noticed they’re ill, the disease could already be far progressed, and because they’re such tiny, vulnerable creatures, it’s imperative to get them to a vet right away.

A prevalent disease in the young hamster population is the condition known as wet tail, *proliferative ileitis*. Wet tail is a bacterial illness causing severe diarrhea and even death. Signs are watery diarrhea and moisture around the tail, loss of appetite, dehydration, unkempt hair, rectal bleeding or rectal prolapse, and uncharacteristic irritability. Stress, sudden change in diet, overcrowding, extreme temperatures, and unsanitary living conditions are among the factors contributing to wet tail. A hamster showing signs of wet tail should be taken to the vet at the earliest sign. Only the vet should direct treatment.

As covered earlier, diabetes is common in certain dwarf hamster species such as Russian dwarf hamsters.

For more information on common illnesses, visit [http://www.hamsterific.com/IllnessGuide.cfm](http://www.hamsterific.com/IllnessGuide.cfm)

**We welcome questions!** Please email hamsters@smallangelsrescue.org. You can see our adoptable animals online at [www.smallangels.petfinder.com](http://www.smallangels.petfinder.com).

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