

# Gerbils

Meriones unguiculatus



**Approximate life span:** 3-4 years

**Estimated adult size:** 80-110 grams

**Difficulty Level:** Beginner



Gerbils are desert rodents native to Mongolia. Because they produce minimal waste, adapted to conserve bodily fluids in the desert, gerbils are typically clean and nearly odorless. Gerbils should be offered a sand bath a few times a week to help maintain their coat. It is important to never grab a gerbil by the tail because the skin and tuft is easily shed as a defense mechanism against predators. This can be painful and, unlike reptiles, does not grow back.

## HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

Gerbils are highly social animals and should be housed in pairs or groups whenever possible. Introduce new gerbils in neutral territory before housing together. Gerbils require well-ventilated cages with solid walls to create burrows and tunnel systems. They chew constantly and will escape from plastic enclosures. Use a glass aquarium with a metal screen lid with at least 10 gallons per gerbil. Offer wood and cardboard nest boxes. These will need to be replaced frequently as they are destroyed. Some gerbils will also benefit from an exercise wheel.

## DIETARY NEEDS

**Pellets:** Gerbils should be fed a high quality gerbil pellet or rodent block in unlimited quantities. Avoid foods that contain seeds or fruit as these can lead to obesity in adult gerbils.

**Treats:** Provide healthy table foods such as grains and fresh vegetables, as approximately 10% of daily diet.

## RECOMMENDED VETERINARY CARE

- Annual exams
- Common illness: seizures, tumors, tail slip, tyzzer's disease, inner ear disease