



## Owning and Caring For Hedgehogs

Prickly on top, but warm and fuzzy underneath: the hedgehog is a compact, quiet, and virtually odor free pet, making them one of the easiest pets to keep. These adorable little guys, although small, have big personalities! And since they are nocturnal, they are best for people who spend time at home in the evenings.

### Facts:

- African pygmy hedgehog
- Lifespan 4-6 years
- Solitary animal
- Has 5000-7000 quills
- Grow 6-9 inches long
- Adult weight of 1-2 lbs
- Poor eye sight
- Most active at dusk, night, and dawn

### Common Problems:

- Cancer
- Skin/ear infections
- Dental/gingival disease
- Salmonella
- Leg and foot injuries
- Liver and kidney issues
- Respiratory infection
- Injury to eyes
- Obesity

### Preventative Care:

- Complete physical exam every 6-12 months
- Yearly fecal exam to check for parasites
- Annual blood work to monitor organ function
- Routine dental exams and nail trims

## DIET ESSENTIALS

**Dry Hedgehog or Cat Food:** There is commercially available food, but it is not always available at pet stores.

A meat based dry cat food that is high in protein is a good substitute. Dry food should be the primary portion of your pet's diet. About 3 Tbsp per day is sufficient and prevents obesity.

**Fruits and Vegetables:** A small amount of fresh fruits and veggies should be added to the diet as well. 1 tsp of chopped fruits/veggies daily is recommended.

**Treats:** Moist cat or dog food/treats that are meat based and high in protein are a great additive to your pet's diet. They also enjoy cooked hamburger, chicken, beans, and eggs. Insects, such as gut-loaded crickets, mealworms, or earthworms are also options for treats that can be given 3-4 times per week.

### Safe Food

- Apple
- Asparagus
- Banana
- Bell Peppers
- Blackberries
- Blueberries
- Broccoli
- Cantaloupe
- Carrot
- Cat Food
- Celery
- Cherry
- Chicken
- Cilantro
- Cranberries
- Cucumber

- Green Beans
- Green Peppers
- Honeydew
- Kiwi
- Leafy Greens
- Mince
- Papaya
- Peach
- Peas
- Plum
- Pumpkin
- Raspberries
- Spinach
- Sprouts
- Squash
- Strawberry
- Sweet Potato
- Turkey
- Turnip
- Watermelon
- Zucchini





## Say NO to...

- Avacados
- Citrus fruit
- Chocolate/candy
- Chives/onions
- Dairy products
- Dried fruits
- Fish
- Garlic
- Grapes/raisins
- Insects from outside
- Legumes
- Nuts
- Potatoes
- Processed foods
- Raw meats/eggs
- Rhubarb leaves
- Seeds
- Slugs/snails



A hedgehog needs to always have a source of clean, fresh water available. A stoppered water bottle in his cage is the best way to supply water.

### Behavior

Hedgehogs are nocturnal, solitary creatures and best housed individually. They may be kept in small groups as long as there is only one adult male present. They prefer quiet environments and react with fright to loud noises and bright lights. A very strong sense of smell is used to identify their surroundings since they have such poor eyesight. Sometimes small children can be overzealous with their affection, causing the hedgehog to become afraid and extend his quills. Therefore, a hedgehog may not be a suitable pet for small children. It is important that they are handled frequently and well-socialized when they are young; however, some adult hedgehogs may not like to be handled regardless of socialization. When exposed to pungent smells or tastes, hedgehogs exhibit a behavior known as "self-anointing" in which they rub frothy saliva on their quills. They are fun to watch, not aggressive, and fairly simple to care for. They are clean and have very little odor to them. Although hedgehogs will naturally hibernate in the wild, your pet should not be allowed to hibernate. Hibernation can be dangerous or even fatal. The easiest way to prevent this behavior is to not let his cage get too cool, especially in the winter months.

### Environment

Although small, hedgehogs are very active animals and require a large cage. The cage should be at least 4 feet long and 2 feet wide, but go with the biggest cage possible. Bigger is always better when it comes to your pet's home. A 20 gallon or larger aquarium, sweater box, or similar smooth-walled enclosure is also a suitable home. Enclosures with wire mesh bottoms are not recommended as these can cause foot and leg injuries. Aspen shavings or recycled newspaper bedding are recommended (AVOID pine, cedar, and cat litter). The cage should be placed away from drafts, air conditioners, heaters, windows, and

other locations where the cage temperature could get too hot or cold. Average temperature should be kept around 70-85°F. Provide supplemental heat with under-tank heating pads and radiant heat emitters as needed. The cage should also be placed where he/she will experience both day and night. Hedgehogs are nocturnal, but they do need periods of light and darkness to remain healthy. A hide area is a place where your hedgehog can hide, feel safe, and relax. Wood boxes, pet igloos, tubing, half logs, or tunnels can all be used as a hide area.

### Handling

To pick up your hedgehog, gently scoop him up from the belly. You should feel fur while doing this and avoid the quills. The quills do look dangerous, but they are not very sharp, and rarely cause injury. Once you have picked him/her up, you can use the other hand to protect and support the back. Remain calm and give your pet time to relax, if he/she rolls into a ball, be patient.

### Grooming

Hedgehogs are generally clean animals, so as long as you maintain a clean cage, very little grooming is required. If a bath is needed, fill your sink with an inch of warm water, and place your hedgehog in the sink. A toothbrush can then be used to gently scrub his quills from front to back. A few drops of baby shampoo may be used. Dry completely by padding with a towel before returning to the cage. Hedgehogs' nails need to be trimmed regularly as well.

