
Home Care for Pet Hedgehogs

Natural History and Behavior

The African pygmy hedgehog is native to West and Central Africa. They typically live between 3-6 years of age. Hedgehogs are nocturnal, and they prefer a dim, quiet environment. They are solitary animals. When threatened hedgehogs will curl into a ball to cover vulnerable areas with their protective spines. Hedgehogs have a unique “self anointing” behavior where they place thick saliva onto their spines when exposed to a new object or substance.

Food and Water

Hedgehogs are omnivores, however they mainly consume a variety of insects and invertebrates. In the wild hedgehogs may also eat frogs, lizards, small mammals, vegetables, and fruits.

- Commercial protein sources include: high quality cat food kibble, insectivore diet, or a commercial hedgehog diet
 - Crude protein should be 30-50% and fat content should be 10-20%
- Appropriate treats: Insects (meal worms, crickets), high quality cat food, fresh chopped vegetables or fruit
- Fresh water should always be available in a bottle or bowl and changed daily.

Caging and Bedding

- Minimum cage size should be 2” x 3”. Cages should have a flat bottom (no wire) to prevent foot and spine injuries.
 - Cage bars must be close enough together so that the hedgehog cannot get its head or teeth stuck
- A hide should be provided, examples include commercially available hides, cardboard or wooden boxes, or large diameter PVC pipes
- Substrate: newspaper, paper bedding (such as CareFresh), or fleece works well
 - Hedgehogs enjoy burrowing, so providing thick bedding is recommended
- Temperature should be maintained between 75-85 degrees F with low humidity (less than 40%)
 - Temperatures below 65 could lead to torpor, which is a hibernation-type state where hedgehog’s become very inactive

Enrichment

- Exercise wheels are highly recommended. The wheel should have a solid floor, rather than wire, to prevent injury.
- Supervised time outside the cage can provide mental stimulation and opportunities for exercise, however, ensure the environment is safe.
 - Limit access to small crevices and openings where your hedgehog could get stuck
 - Be sure your hedgehog doesn’t have access to anything they can chew and swallow inappropriately.



Important Medical Conditions

- *Mites*: Mite infestation is most common in young or newly acquired hedgehogs. Symptoms include dry flaky skin, quill loss, white or brown crusts, and scratching/itching.
- *Obesity*: Obesity is very common in captive hedgehogs and can lead to other medical conditions. Encourage frequent exercise and feed a well-balanced diet to prevent obesity.
- *Hepatic lipidosis (fatty-liver syndrome)*: This condition may be caused by poor diet, obesity, sudden anorexia, and other conditions. Symptoms include weakness/lethargy, yellow discoloration of the skin, and diarrhea.
- *Eye trauma or prolapse*: Symptoms include squinting one or both eyes, eye discharge, swelling of the eye or around the eye, and bulging of the eye.
- *Tumors/Neoplasia*: Tumors most commonly affect the oral cavity, mammary glands, and uterus (in females).
- *Dental disease*: Symptoms of dental disease include red or swollen gums, tartar accumulation on the teeth, drooling, changes to appetite, foul odor to breath, or swelling of the jaw.
- *Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome*: Approximately 10% of hedgehogs are affected by this condition. Most hedgehogs are between the ages of 1-2 when symptoms first occur. Symptoms include falling to one side, hunched posture, tremors, paresis, and seizures.
- *Salmonellosis*: Hedgehogs can be asymptomatic carriers of several strains of salmonella. Transmission to humans has been documented. Wash hands immediately after handling your hedgehog or coming into contact with any fecal material.