

HEDGEHOGS



These animals naturally live through most of Africa and in southern Europe. They are primarily insectivores, but will eat a variety of different animal and plant matter when available. They are nocturnal and spend most of the day sleeping and become active at dusk.

A hedgehog's most distinctive trait are his quills. Quills are sharp hollow hairs that are used as a defense. When threatened, a hedgehog is able to curl up into a ball with its quills extended. The quills usually have white tips with brown bands and act as camouflage. Other color variations can be brown, black, cream, gray, and even albino.

Hedgehogs as Pets

The African pygmy hedgehog is the most common type sold as pets. It can grow to be around six to nine inches long. Four to six years is a normal life span, but a pet hedgehog can live up to ten years. It is a solitary animal and should live alone.

A hedgehog is a very active animal. He will require a large cage even though he is small.

Since hedgehogs are nocturnal, they are best for people who are home in the evenings and at night. A hedgehog may not be a suitable pet for small children. Sometimes kids can be overzealous with their affection causing a hedgehog to become afraid and extend his quills. This could lead to injury of a child or pet.

A hedgehog is fun to watch, quiet, not aggressive, and is fairly easy to care for. It is a clean animal and has very little smell. His food is easily attainable and inexpensive.

Habitat

- A cage that is at least 4 feet long and 2 feet wide. That is the minimum size so go with the biggest cage possible. Multi-level cages are a good way to increase your pet's space.
- Bedding for the bottom of the cage. Bedding made from recycled paper or pulp is a good choice.
- A hide area where you pet can go to feel safe and secure.
- A small animal litter box.
- Litter for the litter box. Litter pellets made from recycled paper work well and are safe.
- A stoppered water bottle. A heavy bowl can be used as an alternative if your hedgehog doesn't like a water bottle.

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- A couple of bowls for dry and moist food. The bowls should be attachable to the cage or heavy enough to prevent spilling.
- An exercise wheel, preferably one with a solid wheel to prevent possible injury.
- A variety of toys and decor to keep your pet entertained. Examples are pipes, tubes, tunnels, ramps, ledges, balls, and bells.
- A small animal playpen for when your hedgehog is out of his cage.

Food

- A dry hedgehog food or cat food that is high in protein and made from meat or chicken.
- Canned cat or dog food to supply your pet with moist food. The food should be high in protein and made from meat or chicken.
- Fruits and vegetables that can be added to your pet's diet. Beans, peas, corn, apples and carrots are some of the foods you can feed your hedgehog in small amounts.
- Various treats to add variety to the diet. Treats can be insects like mealworms and crickets, moist dog or cat treats.

Health & Illness

A great habitat, the correct foods, and proper care go a long way in keeping a hedgehog healthy. Unfortunately, even with the best care injuries or illness may occur. If your pet becomes ill, it is always recommended that you seek advice from a veterinarian. Below are some of the common injuries and illnesses that effect hedgehogs.

Cancer

Cancer is a fairly common disease that affects hedgehogs. A hedgehog may get cancer in any part of its body. Cancer symptoms can be a tumor or resemble a different illness.

Ear Infections

Signs of ear infection include wax buildup and flaky or crusty ears. Ear problems are often caused by mites or fungus.

Eyes

A hedgehog's eye may appear cloudy, swollen, or bulgy. This can be caused by the eye being accidentally poked or scraped. It can also be a symptom of another illness.

Feet

A hedgehog may have bloody or swollen feet. This may be caused by his feet being rubbed raw on a surface that is rough or abrasive. Check his cage for items that would be rough on his feet. Wire exercise wheels are often the culprit. Solid wheels are safer for your pet.

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Bloody feet may also be caused by a ripped or torn nail. Blood loss can be stopped with a styptic pencil, flour, or corn starch. Keeping your pet's nails trimmed and removing items that may snag his nails are the best way to prevent injury.

Fleas & Ticks

Hedgehogs can be infected with fleas and ticks just like dogs and cats. Symptoms can be redness, a rash, and excessive itching or scratching.

Foaming at the Mouth

When a hedgehog foams at the mouth it is completely normal. It is often triggered by strange or unusual smells. A hedgehog may chew on a new smelling item until it has a foam of saliva around its mouth. The hedgehog may then smear and lick the foam all over its sides and quills.

Hibernation

Although hedgehogs naturally hibernate in the wild, your pet should not be allowed to hibernate. Hibernation can be dangerous for your pet and sometimes even fatal. The easiest way to prevent it is to not let his cage get too cool.

Nose

A hedgehog may get a bloody nose from scraping or rubbing it against a sharp or rough object. Although a nose may bleed profusely, once you get the bleeding to stop it will often heal quickly. A styptic pencil and household items like flour or corn starch can all aid in stopping blood loss.

Obstructions

Hedgehogs will eat a variety of items and sometimes an item is not food. The item can get lodged in the stomach or intestines and be potentially fatal. Symptoms can be lethargy, loss of appetite, vomiting, or coma.

Respiratory Infection

Respiratory infection is often caused by a hedgehog's home being too cold. Symptoms can be loss of appetite, lethargy and heavy or noisy breathing.

Skin

Hedgehogs may get a skin disease often caused by mites. Symptoms include hair or quill loss, flaky or dry skin, scabs, redness, and excessive itching.

Teeth & Gums

Hedgehogs can have tooth and gum disease. Symptoms can be loss of appetite, drooling, bad breath, and red or swollen gums. Providing dry crunchy food as the primary part of your pet's diet is the best way to prevent the disease.

Young hedgehogs do lose their baby teeth so there is no need to worry. Hedgehogs may also lose teeth in their later years. You may need to supply an elderly pet softer or smaller foods that are easier to eat.