

Hedgehog Diet & Husbandry

CATS AND CRITTERS
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Characteristics

There are several hedgehog species. The most common species in captivity is the African Pygmy hedgehog. Hedgehogs are small **nocturnal** animals, meaning they sleep during the day and are active at night. Hedgehogs are also solitary creatures and should be housed singly.

Interesting Facts:

- ♥ Typical weight: 250-700 grams
- ♥ Dig burrows
- ♥ Need hiding places
- ♥ Prefer quiet habitats with indirect light.
- ♥ When new objects are introduced into the environment hedgehogs will commonly “taste” or hypersalivate by creating a foam and spitting it onto themselves. This process is known as “anting” or “anointing”.



Common Medical Concerns

Common Medical Concerns: If your hedgehog exhibits the following symptoms, **please contact your veterinarian for an appointment right away:**

- Dental: gingivitis, periodontitis
- Neoplasia: high rate of tumor development in animals over 3 years of age.
- **Salmonella:** There are documented cases of Salmonella transmission from hedgehogs to humans. Several strains of Salmonella can occur in hedgehogs, and it is assumed that all hedgehogs can carry and transmit this pathogen. Wash hands after handling and do not allow the hedgehog or any of its belongings to contact human food or food preparation areas.
- Traumatic Injuries
- Hair/Quill Loss: mites, fungal, and bacterial causes
- Fatty Liver Disease
- Pneumonia
- Intestinal parasites
- Neurologic disease: Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome
- Decrease/Increase eating or drinking
- Weight decrease/increase, (obesity or malnutrition)

Diet A healthy diet is VERY important. Serious health conditions will arise if your hedgehog is not fed properly.
www.exoticnutrition.com

Despite the popularity of keeping hedgehogs in captivity, a number of health issues related to suboptimal diet are still frequently reported. ***More research is still needed in order to determine the exact nutritional needs of these unique mammals.***

Natural Diet: Wild African hedgehogs feed on a variety of invertebrate prey, plant materials, and occasional vertebrate prey. While most of the hedgehog's natural food items are known, the nutritional content of these vastly varying foods is not. In general, insectivorous mammals require diets that consist of 30-50% protein and 10-20% fat. Hedgehogs seem to require higher levels of dietary fiber than carnivores do. This may be related to the large quantity of insect exoskeletons that are included in their natural diets.

Captive Diets: The bulk of the diet should be a commercially prepared hedgehog/insectivore food. Depending upon the animal's activity level and weight, feed 1-2 tablespoons daily. (www.exoticnutrition.com , www.mazuri.com, www.zupreem.com)

In addition:

- 1-2 teaspoons of varied moist foods like meats, eggs, low fat cottage cheese, and moist dog/cat food can be fed.
- ½ teaspoon of fruit (banana, apple, pear, berries) and/or vegetables (beans, cooked carrots, squash, peas, and leafy greens) should be fed daily.

Supplemental Feeding/Treats: Including mealworms, earthworms, wax worms, and crickets. These items maybe hidden in the bedding to encourage natural foraging activity, which helps to promote emotional wellness. Vitamins or mineral supplementation does not appear to be necessary if feeding a commercially available hedgehog/insectivore diet.

Fresh Water should be available at all times.

***Beware that nuts, seeds, raw carrots and other large, hard food items can become lodged in the roof of the mouth.**



Helpful Links:

www.transoniq.com/wodent.html

www.exoticnutrition.com

www.mazuri.com

www.zupreem.com

www.hedgehogcentral.com

www.hedgehogclub.com

Housing

Caging:

- Solid flooring with a wire frame on top to ensure adequate ventilation. The cage should contain a large, smooth bottom (with no wire bottom, ramps or shelves on which hedgehogs can injure their feet).
- A minimum of **seven square feet**. A larger cage provides space for play, toys, and exercise, which are necessary for physical/mental wellbeing. The larger the cage, the cleaner the cage will remain.
- A minimum of 1 to 2 hours of exercise outside of the home cage in a secure environment daily is strongly encouraged.
- The preferred environmental temperature is 75 degrees.

Aquariums are not recommended, as they do not provide enough ventilation.

Bedding: Paper or Hay based bedding is optimal. Fleece material is a reusable and safe option. **Phenols in cedar and pine are believed to cause respiratory complications, as well as liver and kidney damage.** Clay-based litter should be avoided as bedding material, since it is very dusty and can also cause respiratory problems.

Litter Box: Your pet will use a litter box if you provide one. A small box that is 2" deep x 6" x 9", half filled with cat litter does very nicely. Non-clumping cat litter is the safest choice.

Hiding Place: This can be as simple as a piece of 4 inch PVC pipe, a plastic pitcher, a shoe box with a hole cut in one end. (Replace every 2 to 3 weeks). Providing a hiding place is a must for a hedgehog's emotional well-being and health.

Toys: You can also add a few toys for your hedgehog to play with such as a paper towel roll, bird toys, or cat/ferret toys. An exercise wheel is an excellent addition and will help him to stay healthy and trim.

Wheel: a *solid-floored* exercise wheel is recommended because legs can get caught in the bars of wire wheels. A product like the "wodent wheel" is a good option. www.transoniq.com/wodent.html

Food Bowl

Water Bottle: Water bottles are preferred over open dishes.



Cleaning: Cages should be cleaned everyday in order to prevent infection and disease. A complete change of bedding and thorough cleaning of entire cage contents should occur at least **four times weekly**. Use a one-part-bleach to ten-parts-water solution to clean the cage. **Hedgehogs are naturally clean animals and will physically and mentally decline in a dirty cage.**