

How to Keep Your Hedgehog Happy, Healthy and Safe

- Feed once a day in the late afternoon or early evening, preferably in heavy crocks.
- Fresh water must be available at all times, offered either from a sipper bottle or crock.
- Prevent obesity. Ad lib feeding may not be appropriate. Weigh hedgehog at least monthly.
- Take your hedgehog to an exotic mammal veterinarian for a bi-annual physical examination.
- Routine veterinary dental cleanings will decrease the incidence of periodontal disease.
- Prevent chilling; provide heated environment with dry bedding.
- Clean toys frequently.
- Handle your hedgehog every day to keep it tame.
- Maintain a bathing routine using a pan or shallow tub (warm water, warm ambient temperature) for swimming and closely monitor.
- Proper housing should include:
 - » Be a smooth-walled, solid bottom enclosure that is high enough to prevent escape. Aquariums 20 gallon or larger are acceptable
 - » Contain newspaper or recycled material bedding to a depth of several inches and should be changed frequently and kept dry. Avoid pine, cedar and corn cob for bedding
 - » Be maintained in the optimum environmental temperature range of 75-85°F (24-30°C)
 - » Include accessories for climbing/hiding: box, untreated fruit tree log or flower pot, and a solid-bottom exercise wheel
 - » Offer smooth clean rocks for spreading out on, scratching and as face-rubbing surfaces
- It is important to prevent hedgehog from accessing:
 - » Wire flooring in its enclosure
 - » Wire rodent exercise wheels
 - » Cat or dog food as sole diet
 - » Sawdust, pine or cedar shavings
 - » Wet bedding
 - » Garden soil (may contain parasites)
 - » Dogs, cats and young children
 - » Pesticides and other toxins
 - » Electrical cords
 - » Tobacco and cigarette smoke
 - » Toxic houseplants
 - » Strong odors
 - » Plug-in air fresheners
 - » Heavily-scented candles

Common Disorders of Hedgehogs (specific to African Pygmy)

It is recommended that your hedgehog have an annual exam. However, if you notice your hedgehog exhibiting any of these signs or symptoms, please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

- Cancer (especially over 3 years of age)
- Dental disease
- Dermatitis (mange mites, Ringworm)
- Enteritis (including Salmonellosis)
- Fatty liver
- Gastrointestinal parasites
- Obesity
- Ocular injuries
- Pneumonia
- Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (progressive demyelinating paralysis)

Resources

- **Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians** (AEMV.com)
- **Lafeber Emeraid** (lafeber.com/vet/mammal-medicine)
- **Oxbow Animal Health** (oxbowanimalhealth.com)

EXOTICS COMPANION CARE SERIES

How to Care for Your

Hedgehog



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To learn more, visit the Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians at [AEMV.com](https://aemv.com)

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ABOUT YOUR HEDGEHOG

Hedgehogs are indigenous to Europe, Africa and Asia. Two distinct hedgehog species are available to the pet trade: the African or white-bellied hedgehog, which is the most common in the United States, and the European hedgehog.

Free-ranging hedgehogs are hardy animals that live in scrub, deciduous forests, rocky grasslands and deserts. Hedgehogs eat very little plant matter, preferring instead insects, spiders, slugs, snails, worms and grubs. They nest under shrubs and rocks or in burrows. Their sense of smell is highly developed. The body and crown of hedgehogs are covered in short, smooth spines while their underside is soft white fur. The spines of young hedgehogs are sharper than those of mature animals. To reduce the potential risk of Salmonella infection, clients should wash their hands after handling a pet hedgehog and avoid the animal's contact with human food or cooking utensils.

Hedgehogs need liberal exercise and are competent climbers.

Logs can be arranged in the enclosure to form caves, tunnels and arches.

What to Expect from Your Hedgehog

Hedgehogs are nocturnal; they are active in the evenings. If they are allowed to run in the house, they tend to hide in corners or under furniture. Many hedgehogs dig in carpets or in houseplant dirt, if accessible, and will forage for spiders and insect in the home. When encountering certain odors or something new isn't he environment, a hedgehog will "taste" it, then begin hypersalivating and create a foam, which it then spits onto itself. The process is called "anting" or "anointing". Most owners will promptly rinse or bathe the hedgehog to get rid of the material.

Is your hedgehog male or female?

Males have a midventral penis and abdominal testicles, while the female's vulva is located immediately above the anus.

Are hedgehogs tame?

Although the African pygmy hedgehog is being commercially bred and raised, it is essentially non-domesticated and can be extremely timid and nervous animal. Young hedgehogs do not mind being held, but many adults, especially males, struggle to be let loose. Their first defense is to roll up into a tight ball of crisscrossed spines, with the head and legs in the center of the ball. Hedgehogs are not aggressive, but they may bite if provoked. Adults also vocalize with a hissing sound when bothered. Some hedgehogs will uncurl with back stroking of rump spines in a quiet environment and away from bright lighting.

VITAL STATISTICS

BODY LENGTH: 7 inches (17 cm)

TOTAL BODY WEIGHT:

Male, African: 500–600 g

Female, African: 250–400 g

Male, European: 800–1200 g

Female, European: 400–800 g

SEXUAL MATURITY: 2–6 months

MAXIMUM LIFE SPAN: 4–7 years

What do hedgehogs do all day?

Hedgehogs need liberal exercise and are competent climbers. Logs can be arranged in the enclosure to form caves, tunnels and arches. They will use exercise wheels but do not typically "play" with toys. When at ease and during warm weather, hedgehogs like to sleep in a half-ball position or completely flat, legs outstretched.

What should you feed your hedgehog?

The hedgehog diet is omnivorous, high in protein and low in fat. High-fat foods adversely affect the hedgehog's health and longevity. To minimize obesity, ad lib feeding of adults should be discouraged. In the evening, one should feed a portion size that is almost completely consumed by morning. Only a small amount of food needs to be present during the day for a snack.

A sample diet for an adult hedgehog for one day is: 2–3 tablespoons dry (or mixture of dry and canned) low-fat, high protein, chicken or meat-based cat food; 1–2 tablespoons mixed fresh vegetables and 3–5 insects 3–4 times a week. Invertebrates are important to the diet, especially for breeding sows, and may include mealworms, worms, insects and crickets.

If commercial hedgehog/insectivore diets are used, they should be wholesome and free from chemical additives. To introduce

individuals to a new diet, mix the new food

gradually into the old. It helps to

have all chunks

or pieces of the

new and old

foods the

same size and

relative

consistency.

