

Hedgehog FAQ's Sheet

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1. What should I feed my hedgehog?

Most of us feed our animals a mix of several good quality dry kibbles...high in protein and low in fat...such as Wellness, Innova, Royal Canin, Chicken Soup for the Cat Lover's Soul, Newman's Own, Natural Balance, Eukanuba, Solid Gold, Felidae and others. There are also some good quality hedgehog foods...L'Avian, Old Mill, and 8 In 1 . The foods to stay away from are VitaKraft, Brown's and Spike's Delight. It's also okay to feed a little canned food, baby food without spices, cooked chicken or salmon (watch for bones) or scrambled eggs and just a tiny bit of fruits (no grapes or raisins as they're toxic) or cooked veggies. Worms and crickets are for snacks and should be used sparingly. Superworms bite, so if you must feed those please make sure they're dead first and that that head is removed. My rule of thumb is about a tablespoon of dry kibble and a teaspoon of canned and just a dab of fruits/veggies, but that may have to be adjusted a bit depending on the size of the hedgie. Although you can certainly make up your own mix, it's difficult if you only have one or two hedgehogs.

Be sure your hedgie always has fresh water. Some people prefer to use water bottles and others prefer dishes. There have been rare instances where a hedgie's tooth or has been broken or tongue injured with a bottle. However, it's much easier to keep the water in a bottle clean. Whichever you decide to use, make sure your hedgie knows how to use it. If its mom didn't teach it to use a bottle, it may not know how.

2. What kind of bedding should I use?

There are a lot of different opinions on this subject. I think most people starting out use some kind of wood chips or shredded paper like Yesterdays News. If you use wood, stick to aspen as the oils in cedar and pine can make the hedgehog sick. It also sometimes causes problems with males getting stuck in their little boy parts. Most of us like using cloth cut to the size of the cage.

There are several people who make very nice cage liners for cages. Or if you're talented with a sewing machine go to hedgehogwelfare.org. In the "newsletter" section, go to Newsletter #18 Sept-Oct 2005, and you will find the instructions for making the famous "Sherry Blankets".

Be careful with vellux because there is a fine layer of mesh in the center of the fabric which can catch little nails if they dig in it. Be sure them have plenty of fleecy blankets and some sleepy sacks or hats in the cage.

3. Why is my hedgegie losing so many quills?

If your hedgegie is young it may just be shedding baby quills. They have several quillings but have a major one between 7 and 12 weeks of age and can be very grumpy during that period. You'll usually find a pile of quills where they sleep. You should still interact with them, but handle them gently, and if they really get grumpy sometimes a warm (not hot) bath with a few drops of Vitamin E or olive oil might help.

If you find quills are falling off in patches or you see tattered ears, then you could have a mite problem, and a trip to the vet would be in order to have it diagnosed and treated. The treatment is usually two or three topical treatments of Revolution or Ivermectin. If the infestation is severe, they may need the medication in an injectable form.

4. Can I house two hedgehogs together?

There's no yes or no answer to this. Unaltered males and females should NEVER be housed together or you will have babies. Hedgehogs can breed as young as 6-8 weeks which would be very dangerous for their health. A female gets fertile in the presence of a male, so they can breed at any time. NEVER let unaltered males and females play together because you only have to turn your head for a second...

It is not a good idea to put two males together. There are some that get along, but more often than not they will, at some point, fight and can be seriously injured or killed. Never put two males together without very close supervision.

It is quite possible to put females together, but there are still some situations where their personalities just aren't right for cohabitation. When you first put them together, be sure to monitor them closely for possible problems. (See HWS Newsletter #16, May-June 2005)

5. How can I litter train my hedgehog?

I'll start by saying that not all hedgegies can be litter box trained. The best way is to get a Hi-Back square little box that you can find at any pet store. Put either a pellet type litter such as Aspen Supreme (don't use clumping cat litter) or paper litter in it or even paper towels or puppy training pads, and then put their exercise wheel inside the box. Since they pee and poop on their wheel, they usually get the idea that this is where to go. If you find some outside the box, put it inside so they know that's where it should be. (See HWS Newsletter #1, March 2002)

6. What kind of toys do hedgehogs like to play with?

All are different...some don't play, but it seems the favorites are cat balls with bells in them, scented small tennis balls, beanie babies and empty toilet paper tubes. Some also like little toy cars and trucks or "babble balls" that talk to them. Some will also run in the runabout balls that you buy in pet stores (giant or mega size). It's also a must to have a 12" solid surface wheel for a hedgehog. Some run 4 or 5 miles a night.

7. Is a hedgehog like a porcupine?

No, hedgehogs are insectivores and are not related at all to porcupines which are rodents. They're actually related more closely to moles and shrews.

8. My hedgehog weighs... Is that a good weight?

All hedgehogs are different...just like people. Rule of thumb is that if a hedgehog can comfortably roll up in a tight ball, he/she isn't too fat. On the other end, they shouldn't look like a squished Twinkie. We've had hedgehogs that have been perfect at 250 grams and others at 600+ grams.

BUT, it is very important to weigh your hedgehog at least once a week (preferably more often) because rapid weight loss is often the first sign of illness. Very nice scales made by Good Cook can be found at most discount stores like Target, WalMart, etc. for about \$15. Be sure any scale you buy weighs in grams as well as ounces (you can get a more accurate reading), and be sure they have a large flat top to put the hedgehog on. I like to use a salad bowl (the kind you get with McDonald's salads) on top of the scale...they sit real nice in there for their weigh-ins. Be sure to reset the scale to zero before weighing. And it's a good idea to always weigh your hedgehog at the same time of day. I find it easier when I first take them out of their cages before they're fully awake. Losing 20 grams in one day is not alarming (that can be a good poop), but if it continues over several days, there's something wrong.

9. My hedgehog has dry skin. What can I do?

First of all, is there quill loss? If your hedgehog is losing lots of quills, leaving bald patches, and if they have dry skin and/or tattered ears, a vet visit is in order because this could be a sign of mites.

However, a lot of hedgehogs go through periods of dry flaky skin. You can give them a warm (not hot) bath with an oatmeal shampoo (Aveeno is good) or a puppy shampoo with conditioners and add just a few drops of oil (olive, vegetable, jojoba) or Vitamin E. You can also take some Vitamin E or oil and apply it directly to their quills (not too much...just a drop or two). I would stay away from baby shampoos as I find them to be very drying to the skin.

10. My new hedgehog doesn't like me. What can I do?

Hedgehogs, like people, all have their own little personalities and quirks. Some are naturally more outgoing than others.

If you got your hedgehog from a breeder, hopefully it has been well socialized and is just reacting to a new situation. If it's a rescue or came from a pet store, it may or may not have been handled much, and it may take a bit longer to gain his/her trust.

If he hisses when you take him out of his cage and settles down right away, that's pretty normal. If he continues to hiss or won't unroll, let him sit on your lap with a blankie covering him, and just be available if he wants to sniff you and check you out. You might also try bribery...like a worm or a favorite treat. The other thing you can try is putting an old tee shirt that you've worn in the cage with him so that he associates your scent with security. If you're getting a hedgehog from a breeder, cut up some little fleece blankets and sleep with them for a few nights. Send them to the breeder to give to the little one, so you get a head start on the hedgehog knowing your scent. Give it time...this doesn't happen overnight.

Be sure to give your hedgie some "lap" time everyday to keep him well-socialized. TV watching and computer time can be shared with your hedgie.

11. How often should I give my hedgie a bath, and how do I do it?

There's no rule of thumb on this one. When they're dirty...give them one. Some hedgies are very tidy and seldom need baths. Others seem to need them weekly.

There are also many different opinions on how to do this, but basically use warm (never hot) water. Run enough in the sink to come up to their belly or a little higher. Be careful not to get water in their nose or ears. Use a mild shampoo like Aveeno Oatmeal Wash (can buy at any drug store) or puppy shampoo with conditioner. Get them wet and then brush their quills with a toothbrush to get everything out that's in between the quills. Be sure to get all the poop boots off their feet.

Rinse with warm water and put in a towel to dry...or use a hair dryer on low if they'll put up with that. Then transfer to a dry towel and snuggle until completely dry. Never put them back in the cage wet.

12. How do I cut my hedgehogs nails and how often should I do it?

Whew...there are a lot of opinions on this one, too, and a lot depends on the personality of the hedgie. Most often it's easiest to do right after a bath when the nails are clean and soft. As for frequency, it all depends on the hedgehog. You don't want them to get too long so they get caught on things or start to curl under.

Some people like to clip them while they're in the bath. Use cat scissors or small manicure scissors and be careful not to cut them too short.

Another real good method if you have two people is to let one person hold the hedgehog. Let one foot fall through between two of your fingers, have the other person grab it and clip.

The third method which is good for biters...put the hedgehog on it's back. Instinct will be to ball up. As they start to stretch out to unball, grab a foot and pull it as far from the mouth as possible, and clip. With a biter, sometimes a lightweight pair of gardening gloves will save you from pretty bad bites.

If you should clip a nail and it bleeds, just apply a little cornstarch to it to stop the bleeding. It's best not to use the commercial made products for shaving nicks because they tend to burn a bit. Believe me, this has happened to all of us, so don't beat yourself up over it.

13. Should I feed my hedgehog bugs?

Absolutely!!!! Hedgehogs are insectivores, and in the wild would live on bugs and small reptiles. We don't recommend feeding wild bugs because you don't know where they've been. Although you may not use sprays, a neighbor possibly does, and you don't want your hedgegie eating bug spray that an insect has just eaten.

You can feed live meal worms, wax worms, silk worms or crickets which you buy at a pet store. Don't feed Super Worms unless you kill them and cut off the head first because they do bite.

You can also buy freeze-dried worms and crickets or canned. However canned insects spoil quickly. We recommend taking the out of the can, spread the insects on a plate or cookie sheet and place in the freezer for about an hour. Put the insects back into the washed can and store in the freezer. Just remove those you need for the evening about an hour before serving and make sure they're thawed before you give them to the hedgegie.

Insects should be used sparingly as a snack...not the main part of their meal since they are high in fat...maybe 3-5 per day...judgment call according to the condition of the hedgegie.

14. What kind of cage do I need for my hedgehog?

Although hedgehogs are small animals, they do require quite a bit of exercise and, therefore, need a fairly large cage. The absolute minimum size would be 18x24, but the larger the better. The cage also should be at least 15 inches tall to accommodate a wheel. A word of caution about metal cages. They tend to rust if the hedgegie pees on them. You can go to the hardware store and have them cut a piece of plexiglass to fit the bottom of the cage just in case something seeps through whatever bedding you use.

Large sterilite containers can be used, but make sure they are very well-ventilated. Some of the best cages we've found are at www.qualitycage.com/collaps.html. The C-O model with the solid floor is very nice. We would suggest the 30x30x16 or 24x30x16 size.

15. What kind of wheel should I get for my hedgehog?

Your hedgehog needs at least an 11" wheel. A wheel is something that you must have! With very few exceptions, hedgegies love their wheels, and they need the exercise to stay healthy. Hedgehogs have been known to run as much as five to six miles a night in their wheels. The wheel should have a solid surface. There are several types of wheels on the market. Some of the metal wheels are fine (make sure they have a substantial stand and won't tip easily). Silent spinners are okay for small hedgehogs but don't seem to work as well for larger ones because they are in two parts and tend to split in the middle. A lot of us really like bucket wheels which are made from plastic buckets and have roller blade

wheels for the bearings. They are very quiet and easy to clean. Some hedgies have problems with slipping, so you can clean them with rubbing alcohol and apply some bath tub decals for traction. There are also cake wheels which are very similar to the bucket wheels

You can get very good wheels at www.carolinastormhedgehogs.com or at www.qualitycage.com

16. My hedgehog has a wide bald spot down the middle of his head? Should I take him to the vet?

That "reverse Mohican" is normal in all hedgies...it's just more noticeable in some than in others. This has something to do with allowing them to ball up and is nothing to worry about.

17. Will all vets see hedgehogs?

Absolutely not! It's a good idea to research the vets in your area before you have an emergency. You would want to look for a vet with experience treating hedgehogs...usually one that is an "exotic" vet or treats "pocket pets". A lot of vets will say they'll treat hedgehogs but have little or no experience with them. There is a list of hedgehog friendly vets on this website (hedgehogwelfare.org) listed by state, so that's a good place to start, but I always suggest talking to a vet so you feel comfortable with him/her before you have an emergency.

18. Are hedgehogs illegal in my state?

Currently there are six states where hedgehogs are illegal and can be confiscated and euthanized if you're caught with one. They are Arizona, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Maine, and Pennsylvania . They are also illegal in Washington D.C. and in New York City (all boroughs) but not New York State. There are also some local laws in cities or counties that prohibit the ownership of exotic animals, so it's always best to check if you're not sure.

19. My hedgehog won't eat. What should I do?

If a hedgehog doesn't eat for more than a day or two, there's definitely something wrong, and you need to get him/her to a vet. If a hedgehog goes too long without food (sometimes just a few days) they can develop Fatty Liver Disease. If you have to syringe-feed a hedgie, you can either "scruff" them right behind the ears and down near the quill line or hold them up against your body. Don't lay them on their back...they could choke on the food or aspirate it into their lungs. Syringe slowly but steadily...and don't forget some water, too. Hills A/D cat food (get from a vet) can be watered down for syringing. You can also get a product from your vet called Carnivore Care made by Oxbow. That's a powder that you mix with water, so you can make it thin enough to feed easily. Also, some hedgehogs that aren't eating with willingly take vanilla or strawberry Boost that you can buy in any drug store or grocery store. It's loaded with vitamins and calories.

You can also grind up kibble in a food processor or coffee grinder and mix it with water or get some meat-based first-stage baby food.

20. My hedgehog feels cold and is very lethargic. What should I do?

If your hedgehog is cold to the touch and not moving around much or eating well, the temperature in his room is probably too cold and he is starting to hibernate. Although hibernation is normal for European hedgehogs, the African variety doesn't hibernate. If they try, they only go into a semi-hibernation state and could die. You need to warm up your hedgehog. The best way to do this is to stick them under your shirt against your skin and leave them there until they feel warm.

If their room isn't a minimum of 70 degrees, you may need to give them some additional heat source. One good way to do this is to put a heating pad with a timer on it under part of their cage. Be sure not to heat the entire cage in case they want to move away from the heat. Some hedgehogs are fine with 70 degrees but some need it warmer than that. Keep in mind that older or sick animals usually need it a bit warmer. You can also buy a product called a Snuggle Safe which is about the size of a thick Frisbee with a gel inside. It's heated in the microwave for about 6 minutes and will keep its heat for 10-12 hours. Be sure to cover it with something so the hedgehog doesn't get burned.

As always, these are just suggestions, and in no way should be used in place of veterinary help if your hedgie is sick. If you have more questions, please sign up for Yahoo group, hedgehogwelfare, and ask away. There are a lot of people there with a lot of experience that will answer any questions you may have.

Other good places for information are hedgehogwelfare.org, hedgehogclub.com and hedgehogcentral.com.

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