

## Normal and abnormal behaviour

### Hamsters

#### Normal Hamster behaviours

##### 1. Being Active at Night

If your hamster is awake and running around their habitat at night, have no fear—this is a sign of a happy hamster.

“Hamsters are nocturnal animals,” says Dr. Shermaine Wilson Cox, a small animal veterinarian based outside of Atlanta, Ga. “This means they are less active during the day and more active at night. They are really energetic and will exercise for three to four hours each night.”



##### 2. A Whole Lot of Chewing

You may notice your hamster chewing on a regular basis and could think it's cause for concern. But chewing behaviour in hamsters is a way for these small animals to file and grind down their teeth.

“Hamster front teeth are constantly growing. Since they are always growing, they need to be filed daily,” says Ochoa. “Give them approved things to chew on. Things like wooden blocks or crunchy food are good for them to chew on.”

##### 3. Stuffing Their Cheeks

We've all seen adorable videos of hamsters stuffing their cheeks with food, and this behaviour is perfectly normal. Hamsters use their cheek pouches to carry and store food, says Wilson Cox, who adds that hamsters can carry up to 50 percent of their body weight in their cheeks.

“The cheek pouches are used to transport food, bedding material, and occasionally their young,” she says. “After stuffing their cheek pouches with food, they will take it back to their burrow or special hiding place and empty the pouches into their food store.”

##### 4. Burrowing and Hiding

Hamsters instinctively burrow or hide as a means of protection and staying safe. So, if you see your hamster hiding or burrowing in their habitat, you have no need to fret. “This is their way of hiding from any danger,” says Ochoa. “They will usually hide when they want to rest. This is how they stay safe while they sleep.”

#### Abnormal Hamster Behaviours

While the above behaviours are things pet parents can expect from their hamsters, the following are signs that a hamster may be sick or unwell. If you notice any of these symptoms, make an appointment to see your veterinarian.

##### 5. Hibernating

If there is a sudden drop in temperature in a hamster's environment, a hamster may go into hibernation. Wilson Cox explains that this often happens at a temperature of approximately 41 degrees Fahrenheit. A pet's habitat should be kept at normal household temperatures to maintain a healthy pet (up to 80 degrees Fahrenheit), so while although may be normal for hamsters, it shouldn't ever happen with your pet at home.

##### 6. Lethargy

As previously mentioned, hamsters are active and energetic animals, so if you see a hamster that lacks energy or is being sluggish, have them evaluated by a veterinarian. “Any time a hamster is acting lethargic we start to worry,” says Ochoa. “Hamsters do not show signs of sickness until they are very sick.”

##### 7. Not Eating or Drinking

A healthy hamster should have a healthy appetite, so if your hamster is not eating or is refusing food, there may be something wrong. “With them being so small, even just a few hours without eating or drinking, they can get dehydrated very easily,” says Ochoa.

##### 8. Not Chewing

If you notice malocclusion (improperly aligned teeth) or that your hamster's teeth look overgrown

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and you don't see your hamster chewing regularly—even if you've supplied proper chewing tools—this is a sign of possible concern.

### 9. Uncharacteristic Hiding

Hamsters do burrow and hide, but it's mostly when they are sleeping. If your hamster is hiding constantly during regular awake or play periods, it may be a sign of anxiety or stress. "If a pet is afraid, they will usually be hiding a lot," says Ochoa. "They may do this if a cat [or other animal] is constantly watching them."

### Other Signs of Hamster Sickness

In addition to the above behaviours that may signal a sickness or medical condition, other signs to watch for include:

- Cloudy, sunken, or swollen eyes
- Hair loss
- Weight loss
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Sneezing
- Discharge from the eyes, nose or mouth
- Heavy breathing
- Tumors



### Knowledge Questions

1. How many hours do hamsters exercise for at night?
2. Why do hamsters chew?
3. What are cheek pouches used for?
4. Why do hamsters burrow and hide?
5. At what temperature will hamsters go into hibernation?
6. What is the definition of 'Malocclusion'?
7. What could be a sign of anxiety or stress?