



Canobie Lake Veterinary Hospital
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Introduction to Hedgehog Care

Behavior

Hedgehogs are nocturnal animals who generally like quiet hidden areas. They like to dig in dirt and will forage for insects in the wild. Many hedgehogs will be frightened by loud noises. They prefer dim lighted areas as opposed to brightly lighted areas. Young hedgehogs may like to be held, but adults generally resist handling. They will occasionally hiss and make a clicking noise, this means they feel threatened. Very few hedgehogs will bite. They will typically puff up and roll into a ball when threatened.

Caging

Hedgehogs need secure enclosures with high smooth sides to prevent escape. Twenty gallon aquariums work well and are easily cleaned. Wire enclosures should NOT be used because they can cause trauma to the feet.

Newspaper or recycled pelleted absorbable material works best. Cedar shavings should NOT be used due to allergic reactions and respiratory distress. Bedding should be changed frequently and kept dry.

Food and water bowls should be made of heavy ceramic material to prevent from tipping over. A water sipper may be used but should be checked daily for any clogs.

A small box with dust free, non-clumping cat litter should be placed in the enclosure. Not all hedgehogs will use a litter box, but those trained young enough may become accustomed to them. Litter boxes should be changed frequently.

A hiding area should be placed in the enclosure to allow the hedgehog privacy. A small box or piece of PVC pipe may work well. Commercial products also work well, but stay away from nest material that is made of twine or string. These materials can cause trauma to the limbs of hedgehogs.

An exercise wheel provides good stimulation for the hedgehog. Pet supply stores will have wheels made specifically for hedgehogs. Wire wheels should not be used because they can cause trauma to the feet. Plastic hamster exercise balls may be used under supervision of the owner. NEVER leave a pet unsupervised in a plastic exercise ball.

A shallow pan with warm water may be provided periodically to allow the hedgehog to swim/bathe.

Diet

Hedgehogs should be fed a commercial hedgehog diet which can be found at pet supply stores. If one cannot be found, dry kitten or cat chow can be substituted. In addition to chow, a hedgehog should be fed vegetables, mealworms, crickets, and fruits as treats. Treats may be given 3-4 times a week.

Water should be available for the hedgehog at all times. Change the water daily to be sure it is fresh.

Preventive Care

Hedgehogs should have an annual exam to keep track of overall health. They do not usually show signs of illness until they are quite sick, therefore yearly exams help monitor health. The nails of hedgehogs need periodic trimming to avoid any tears or breaks. Also, routine brushing of teeth is encouraged.

Common problems in hedgehogs include: Obesity, gingivitis, dry flaky skin, loss of quills, lack of appetite, respiratory illness (runny nose and sneezing), diarrhea, and injuries to limbs. If you notice any of these symptoms please call us. The sooner we can address a problem, the more successful we will be in treating it.