



HEDGEHOG WELFARE SOCIETY
www.hedgehogwelfare.org

AFRICAN HEDGEHOG CARE SHEET

This information sheet is designed to give caregivers basic information regarding the care of hedgehogs. For more in-depth information, several web links are provided at the end of this article.

HOUSING:

Careful consideration should be given to the size of accommodations you are going to provide for a hedgehog. The cage needs ample room to not only hold their wheel, bed, toys, litter box, and food and water dishes, but for the hedgehog to roam around in as well. The smallest cage should be at least 18x24 inches, but the bigger the better. Quality Cage Company in Portland, Oregon (<http://www.qualitycage.com/>) makes wonderful collapsible cages at a very reasonable price. The 30" X 30" size is a very generous choice for your quilly friend and costs approximately \$65.00 plus shipping. The 24" x 30" is still a good size although less ideal and costs approximately \$55.00 plus shipping. They also have excellently priced solid-surface wheels in 11" and 15" diameter, costing approximately \$35.00-\$40.00. Almost all hedgehogs are fine with the 11" wheel; the 15" is better for very large hedgehogs or for cagemates who run side-by-side, since it's wider. They are offering a 10% discount for orders placed for rescued TX hedgehogs; just mention it when you order. Make certain you do not use any cage with a wire floor because they can cause serious injuries!

Another alternative are the HUGE sterilite storage containers, but some hedgies can escape from those, and you must not add a lid to those or your hedgehog will not get adequate ventilation. Aquariums have been used, but again, there is the ventilation issue and the tank would need to be very large indeed!

As a substrate, we recommend cut and sewn to fit liners made from sturdy cloth such as corduroy or twill fabric. Never use terry towels since their nails can get caught in the cloth loops. If you prefer wood shavings, use only Aspen shavings. Cedar is a definite no-no as it contains carcinogenic phenols that are known to cause cancer and respiratory illness. You can also use a product called Carefresh, which resembles ground up gray cardboard. Close attention must be paid to a male's genitals if litter or shavings of any kind are used, as it can get stuck to or under the penile shaft.

WATER AND FOOD DISHES:

Water bowls should be made of something heavy and shallow so your hedgie can get to it and not tip it over. Wash thoroughly every day and replenish with fresh water. If you use a water bottle, it too must be scrubbed frequently and water should be changed daily to prevent bacteria from building up. **Some hedgies do not know how to drink from one or the other. Make certain your hedgehog knows how to drink from whatever you are providing to her/him! Also, although rare, there have been instances of hedgehogs breaking teeth on water bottles. Food dishes follow the same rules; shallow and heavy work best. Good sources for small dishes include cooking stores for small Pyrex bowls, or oriental grocery stores for small plastic sauce bowls (don't use pottery or ceramic bowls from an oriental grocery store, since they may contain lead-based paint or glaze.)

ACCESSORIES:

Wheels: A must for your hedgehog! It will provide hours of entertainment and exercise for your pet. **DO NOT use a wire-surfaced wheel unless it is thoroughly lined with craft foam or some other washable material to keep your hedgies

feet from slipping in between the bars, since wire-surfaced wheels can cause serious injuries such as broken legs and feet. You can buy great bucket or cake wheels at www.carolinastormhedgehogs.com. Also, see above for a description of the excellent metal wheel made by Quality Cage. They're offering a 10% discount for orders for the rescued TX hedgehogs; just mention it when you order. A bucket style wheel is also a good choice (some members of the HWS make these; see the HWS link at the end of this care sheet and visit it to learn how to join the Hedgehog Welfare Yahoo Group to access members); they are easy to clean and safe for your hedgehog. Many pet stores carry the "Silent Spinner" wheel (you need size "Large") or the "Comfort Wheel" (you need size "Giant"). We recommend using some of those bathtub anti-slip stick-ons around the inside of the wheel. Not only do they provide better traction, they also add a nice decorative touch! It is perfectly normal for a hedgehog to poop and urinate on their wheel; placing a litter pan beneath the wheel to catch the run-off will encourage the use of the litter pan. Scrub those dirty wheels daily to prevent your hedgehog's feet from getting infected! Taking the wheel into the shower with you is an easy way to clean it. **Do not buy a wheel less than 11 inches in diameter, as the hedgehog's spine will be curved too sharply when they use the wheel.

Toys: Cat balls with the bells inside, ferret treat balls, and even a toilet paper tube cut in half lengthwise all make good toys for your hedgehog. They love to stick their heads in the tube and run around with it. You can also hang a wooden bird toy with a bell on the end inside the cage. Many hedgehogs will enjoy making the bell ring. Check out those white 4" diameter PVC pipes at your local hardware store (do not use the black ones as the material they're made of was reported to be toxic) and make sure you buy none smaller than 4" in diameter so your hedgehog doesn't get stuck in them! They are cheap, come in many different shapes, are easy to clean and make interesting places for your hedgehog to crawl through.

Critter Balls: Many hedgehogs will love to run freely around the house in one of those large plastic critter balls, and it will keep her/him safe and you entertained watching as well! They're found in many pet stores as "Run-About Balls" and you'll need the "Giant" or "Mega" size to protect their spine.

Beds: A plastic pet igloo makes an excellent hideaway and place to sleep for your hedgehog. Most pet stores carry them, and they cost approximately \$6.00. Just place a nice warm fleece blanket inside and maybe a safe stuffed toy for your hedgehog to cuddle with and he or she will stay nice and cozy! You can also use hats, hedgehog bags, etc. for hiding places.

Litter Boxes: Many hedgehogs will use them. A cookie sheet or flat plastic pan or cardboard box with the sides cut down to ~1-2" high will all work; place it under the wheel as described above. As for litter, Carefresh generally does not cause problems for hedgehogs, and Yesterday's News is also an excellent product. You can also line the pan with paper towels or puppy pads. ****WE DO NOT** recommend clay or clumping cat litter as it can stick to their genitals and some hedgehogs have been known to eat it! To "encourage" your hedgehog to use the litter box, when s/he poops, place the droppings in the litter pan so s/he will see where it is supposed to go. Also, if you notice that your hedgehog prefers one corner of the cage, you may wish to move the litter box there. You can also use a Hi-Back litter box made for ferrets that they sell at any pet store, and put the wheel inside the box. Most hedgehogs will learn that's where they should go. There is an article on litter training in the March 2002 newsletter on the HWS website, written by Jennifer Plombon. You can access this at: www.hedgehogwelfare.org/

SOCIALIZING YOUR HEDGEHOG:

So you have a new hedgehog and s/he or she is a sharp-quilled, tight ball of hissing, popping, and clicking attitude??!! Don't despair, this happens ALL the time and doesn't mean your pet will act like this forever. Hedgehogs usually act defensively out of fear. Give your pet ample time to adjust. Daily handling is important, even if it's just to let her or him sit on your lap under a snuggle sack and sniff you. Talk softly to your hedgehog and offer favorite treats by hand (mealworms, bits of chicken etc.) Take an old t-shirt and wear it for a day, and then place that shirt in your hedgehog's cage so s/he will come to know your scent and associate it with safety and comfort. Above all else, be **patient**; it may take some time to create a snuggler, but if you do you will have yourself a wonderful companion! Some hedgehogs remain aloof or independent and seem uncomfortable with handling. If they're warm, well-fed, loved, given a wheel and adequate habitat, that may be enough for them and you may only have a companion you can chat with, rather than cuddle. You do need to respect their boundaries and not push them to be other than they are.

LIGHT AND TEMPERATURE:

Hedgehogs are by nature nocturnal or crepuscular mammals, meaning they are awake at night and sleep most of the day, or are awake at dusk, dawn, and for periods during the night. Please do not try and change their "inner clock" just to make it easier for you to interact with them. They'll be disoriented and miserable. Despite the fact that they sleep during the day, they still should be situated in a bright room during the day and a dark room at night, to mimic what they would have in nature. It's best to interact with them in the early-to late evening or very early morning. We cannot stress this enough:

KEEP YOUR HEDGEHOG WARM!! Anything below 70 degrees or so for a room temperature can cause hibernation attempts, which will lead to lethargy, unwillingness to eat and or drink, illness, and quite often death. Equally important is that hedgehogs do not tolerate extremely high temperatures either. There is always room for variance, but in general a good range is a room temperature between 75 - 80 degrees. Most hedgehogs will require supplemental heat, especially in the winter or when air conditioning is set very low. You can use a human-type heating pad or electric blanket, set on LOW, placed *under* the cage or sterilite container, against the cold floor. Some pads and blankets have automatic shut-offs, so if yours does, be sure to re-set it to ON as needed. A small ceramic or electric space heater in their room is also useful. Please use any electrical heating appliance with extreme caution: they can short out or overheat causing burns and or death to your pet.

If you ever pick up your hedgehog and s/he is limp, lethargic, and their belly feels cold to the touch, immediately tuck her or him under your shirt or on a heating pad to warm up, and then make sure s/he is kept in a warmer habitat. It can take an hour or more to warm them sufficiently to perk up and behave normally.

DIET:

This is a very important subject for hedgehog owners. Hedgehogs are susceptible to many cancers and other health issues; therefore diet is extremely important to their health. There are many opinions on what these animals should eat, and many different commercial diets available. We tend to lean on the side of "fresh is best". A good daily diet would consist of: approximately 1-2 tsp. of cooked, chopped, unseasoned, skinless chicken, turkey, or salmon, several crickets or mealworms, and 1-2 tsp. of a high quality commercial cat food such as Fromms, Felidae, Purina One Chicken and Rice or a hedgehog food such as Brisky's Old Mill Hedgehog Diet (<http://www.brisky.com/8/359>) or Select Diet (<http://exclusivelyhedgehogs.com/>). Many guardians leave some kibble in the cage at all times, in case they're out or held up at dinnertime, and offer the fresh dinner food every night. Most hedgies will enjoy a few small bites of fruits (no grapes or raisins as they're toxic) or veggies such as watermelon, cooked mashed peas or sweet potatoes, or applesauce. Offer a few mealworms, crickets or wax worms every day; hedgehogs are insectivores and need to eat insects. ****Do not feed live-caught insects from your yard or house.** They can carry parasites, pesticides and other chemicals. ****Do not feed uncooked meat or fish.** This can cause illness and digestive upset. Live mealworms or crickets can be purchased at pet stores, but many guardians prefer to use canned mealworms or crickets. These spoil quickly once the can is opened, even if kept refrigerated, so you might want to store them frozen. Simply open the can, spread the mealworms or crickets on a plate or cookie sheet, and freeze. Once they're solid, scrape them up with a spatula and replace in the can which has been rinsed and dried. Keep the can in the freezer and remove the desired amount each evening; they thaw quickly.

NAIL TRIMMING:

Many guardians are intimidated by nail trimming, and almost all hedgehogs hate it. Nevertheless, it needs to be done, as their nails can grow into the pads of their feet and or grow so long as to impair normal walking, which over time can cripple your hedge. One of the easier ways we've found to trim the nails is to put the hedgehog in an inch of warm water (which will make them uncurl) and then carefully take one foot at a time and clip each nail, being careful not to cut so short as to cause bleeding. Since they're in water, the hedgehog *might* be more likely to stay uncurled. Regular nail clippers people use for themselves work just fine, but many people prefer to use small cuticle scissors, which allow you to see the nail a little better before you cut it. If you do make a nail bleed, apply cornstarch or flour to stop the bleeding. Commercially available styptic powders for pets may be used, but they're rumored to cause stinging. Some hedgehogs are easier to handle out of water; you may hold them on your lap, rolled into a snuggle sack or towel, and grab one foot at a time, clipping as many nails as you can before the foot is snatched back. It may take several "visits" to clip all the nails, and if your hedgehog is simply too anxious or upset to be easily clipped, you may need to schedule a vet visit. If your hedgehog needs to be anesthetized at the veterinarian's for any other reason, ask if they will clip nails for you at the same time to save the hedgehog some grief.

VET EXAMINATION:

It's better, if possible, to have a hedgehog-experienced veterinarian lined up *before* acquiring your hedgehog. Many veterinarians have little, if any, knowledge of these animals and that can be a problem should your pet become ill. There is a member-generated and constantly updated list of hedgehog-experienced veterinarians for most states and provinces at www.hedgehogwelfare.org Once you have established a veterinarian you feel comfortable with and have acquired your new pet, schedule an initial examination to make sure all is well and that there are no internal or external parasites.

The first exam should include the following:

*Review of **diet, habitat, behavior** and **methods for handling**.

***Physical Examination:** Weight, visual inspection, auscultation, oral exam, body temperature, palpation and digit exam.

***Fecal Float and Direct Smear:** to examine for parasites. (Salmonella culture and screen if a problem is suspected).

***Urinalysis.**

***Toe nail trim and skin scraping:** to check for mites, and **ear exam.**

***Tooth scaling:** once per year recommended.

Bring a fresh stool sample along with you, and a urine sample if possible. Stool samples are easy to get, urine isn't always as easy. Try placing your hedgehog in a clean container until he/she urinates, and then pour or suck up the urine with a syringe or dropper and place it in a clean glass jar. Refrigerate immediately and bring to the appointment.

COMMON HEALTH CONCERNS:

FLD: Fatty Liver Disease: Symptoms usually not evident until disease has dangerously progressed, the most obvious being a jaundiced appearance, most evident on and around the belly. Caused by a diet too high in fat, or sudden severe weight gain or weight loss which causes the liver to deposit fat.

Mites or Mange: Have your vet do a skin scraping to check for these.

Raggedy Ears: Possible mites or fungal infection. You can try bag balm, cocoa butter, or shea butter on them to see if it clears up. If the problem returns, a vet visit is in order.

Cancer: Feed a high quality diet without chemical preservatives, additives and artificial flavorings or colors. Know the health background of the hedgehog you get, if possible. Always schedule a vet visit for lumps, bumps, discolorations, bleeding, abnormal behaviour, or anything “different” that causes you concern.

WHS: Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome: A degenerative myelopathy, it usually presents with a “wobbliness” and or inability to walk normally, or tipping to one side. WHS is progressive to complete paralysis and is fatal. This disease is genetically acquired and is “spread” by breeding of carriers. Visit www.hedgehogwelfare.org to find a list of veterinarians, many of whom have experience with this disease, and to join the Hedgehog Welfare Yahoo Groups list, many of whose members have extensive experience in caring for hedgehogs with WHS. There is great information at <http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/comemeetmyfamily/tableofcontents.html>

BREEDING:

A USDA license is generally required to breed, sell or trade hedgehogs. There are some exceptions for small breeders. Breeding these animals is a very serious undertaking, and many things can go wrong with the mother during pregnancy and delivery of her babies. PLEASE consider this carefully before deciding you want to breed. Hedgehogs are capable of breeding as early as 5 to 6 weeks of age, so please keep males and females separated! Opinions differ a bit on this, but we do not advise breeding a female hedgehog until she's **at least** 7 months of age, and **never** after 2 years of age.

LEGAL ISSUES:

Make sure before acquiring a hedgehog that they are legal to own in your State or Province. They are illegal in several areas of the US and Canada. Some counties also require special permits to have a hedgehog.

LINKS AND OTHER INFORMATION:

The following websites are highly recommended to further your education of African Hedgehogs, and to locate products for your pets:

Hedgehog Welfare Society: <http://www.hedgehogwelfare.org/> This society was set up to serve the hedgehog owning community, and the animals they love so much. Education, rescue and rehab is stressed, an online store is provided, there is a veterinarian list spanning the US and Canada, adoption and relinquishment information and much more!

Tommy's Place Pampered Hedgehogs: <http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/comemeetmyfamily/tableofcontents.html> (for a complete listing of hedgehog subjects) Or go to:

<http://www.angelfire.com/wa2/comemeetmyfamily/CaringForYourHedgehog.html>

A very large and comprehensive website on every aspect of the African Hedgehog, from veteran hedgehog owner Laura Ledet. Many photos, product and site links, rescue and adoption sites, licensed breeders list, and much, much more.