

Feeding your pet gerbil

In the wild, gerbils live partly on dry seeds, but these are emergency rations for when something more nutritious is not available. Gerbils need some animal protein in their diet, so they will eat insects; but also eat fresh vegetable material.

What should I feed my gerbil?

A good quality commercial gerbil mix will take the place of the seed part of your gerbil's diet and you can feed a mixture of fruit and vegetables as well as a source of animal protein. The protein can be provided in the form of some complete cat food, chopped hard-boiled egg or insects.

Where can I get live insects from?

If you want to give your gerbils live insects, you will need to find a pet shop that specialises in reptile feeds. Lots of small lizards have to be fed on live insects, and things like mealworms and crickets are bred for this purpose. If you get insects from a shop, you can be sure they've had no contact with insecticides or other harmful chemicals. Crickets are better than mealworms for two reasons:

- Mealworms just sit there, but the gerbil gets exercise chasing the more active crickets.
- Mealworms are very, very low in calcium, which is essential for good bone strength - if gerbils eat too many mealworms, it can upset their calcium balance.

Do I have to feed live insects?

No, you don't! Feeding live insects is probably only possible if you keep your gerbil in a big aquarium tank. If you don't feed live insects, try cheese, meat, egg or yoghurt.

Is it possible to feed sunflower seeds?

It isn't a good idea to feed too many sunflower seeds, as they are high in fat and low in calcium. Commercial gerbil mixes do contain some sunflower seeds, and in small quantities these will do no harm, but they should not be a significant part of the diet.

However, gerbils particularly like sunflower seeds; you will notice that your gerbil will take out and eat all the sunflower seeds first; so you will need to make sure you do not feed too much mix otherwise your gerbil will eat his favourite seeds and not much else!

How do I choose the best gerbil food?

The best gerbil mixes are those that contain animal protein. These are sold in sealed packs, with a sell by date on them, this ensures the food is fresh and you can also check the vitamin content on the packet. When buying this type of gerbil food, be sure to buy small quantities, this will ensure the food is always fresh. Once you have opened a new packet, store it in an airtight, insect-proof container.

If you want any other information on health issues concerning your small animal please contact Hampden Veterinary Hospital on 01296 423666 and we will be happy to advise you.