

Handling a Hamster



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- Each booklet illustrates one way to perform a skill and it is acknowledged that there are often other approaches. Before using the booklets students should check with their university or college whether the approach illustrated is acceptable in their context or whether an alternative method should be used.
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Equipment list: Handling a hamster

Equipment for this station:

- Model rodent



Considerations for this station:

- Hamster handling video available on the AHWLA website. Click on 'Tutorials' and then 'Practical Animal Handling' or scan the QR code above.

Please inform a member of staff if equipment is damaged or about to run out.



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Clinical Skills: Sexing a Hamster



Hamsters are mainly nocturnal with some short periods of activity during the day so care must be taken not to surprise them when they are sleeping, as this will almost certainly result in you being bitten. When approaching the hamster's cage make some noise around the hamster's bedding near to where it is sleeping. The hamster will wake up and not be surprised and usually come out from its bed where it can be more easily captured.



When sexing hamsters the palming method is used. Unlike the other small rodents hamsters only have very short tails so the method of tail lifting is not appropriate. Place the hamster in one hand facing towards you, then place your other hand over the top and turn the hamster over to reveal its underside using two fingers in a scissors action to reveal the genital area.



This is **a female hamster**. The anogenital distance is shorter. Nipples will only be visible if the female is lactating or very young.



This image is of a male hamster. The anogenital distance is longer and the testicles are visible. The testicles can be retracted (open inguinal canal) so may not always be immediately apparent in the scrotum.

Syrian Hamsters:

- Male : Buck
- Female : Doe
- Young : Cubs
- Oestrus : Spontaneous cycle every 4 days and lasts for 8-26 hours. Postpartum oestrus (approx 24 hrs after parturition. Recurrence of oestrus at end of lactation.
- Gestation : 15 days
- Birth weight : 2g
- Size of litter : 5 - 10 on average
- Stage of development at birth : Young are born blind and hairless
- Eyes open : 10 - 15 days
- Weaning age : 21 days
- Breeding Age : Female 6 - 10 weeks Male 10 – 14 weeks
- Adult weight : 100 – 200 g
- Breeding life of female : 12 months
- Breeding life of male : 18 months
- Life expectancy : 1.5-2 years on average
- Rectal temperature: 38 °C hibernates
- Heart rate: 276 - 425 beats per min
- Respiratory rate: 100 – 250 breaths per min
- Syrian hamsters have bilateral pigmented sebaceous glands on their flanks which are more prominent in male.



Russian Hamsters:

- Male : Buck
- Female : Doe
- Young : Cubs
- Oestrus : Spontaneous cycle every 4 days and lasts for 8-26 hours. Postpartum oestrus (approx 24 hrs after parturition). Recurrence of oestrus at end of lactation.
- Gestation : 15 - 18 days
- Birth weight : 2g
- Size of litter : 5 – 10 on average
- Stage of development at birth : Young are born blind and hairless
- Eyes open : 10 - 15 days
- Weaning age : 21 days
- Breeding Age : 6 – 7 weeks
- Adult weight : 20-40g
- Breeding life of female : 12 months
- Breeding life of male : 18 – 24 months
- Average life span : 1.5 - 2 years
- Rectal temperature : 38 °C
- Heart rate : Data not available
- Russian dwarf hamsters have a ventral scent gland