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Hamster Suitability Quiz - Is a Hamster Right for Me?

Started by Taxonomist , Nov 18 2015 04:22 AM

Hamsters are pretty neat animals, and can make amazing pets. They're adorable, unique, and capable of forming very special bonds with their keepers. However, as with any pet, they're not the right choice for everyone.

This is kind of a "quiz" as to whether or not a hamster is a good choice for you. It's not a knowledge quiz, but rather one that asks questions about your personal situation. These are things you should ideally be considering before getting a hamster. *(For the sake of clarity, you certainly do not have to post your answers publicly! This is more of a self-evaluation type thing - just something to get the wheels turning.)*

If you can honestly and confidently answer "yes" to all of these questions, a hamster may be a good fit for you. This should not be your only method of deciding, of course, but it does show that you're on the right track!

If you cannot honestly and confidently answer "yes" to all of these questions, then a hamster may not be a good fit for you right now. This doesn't mean that you're irresponsible or that you're a bad owner (if you already have a hamster). All it means is that you may need to make some adjustments to be the best pet owner you can be.

1) Are you willing and able to care for an animal that is not friendly or handleable?

Hamsters can have a huge range of personalities - friendly, aloof, shy, fearful, antisocial, and more. Not all hamsters are going to want human interaction, and there is nothing "wrong" with a hamster that would rather be left alone. If being able to hold and cuddle with a pet is an absolute necessity for you, and you cannot deal with having an antisocial or unhandleable animal, a hamster is not the right pet for you. Responsible pet ownership requires taking care of the animal that you committed to...regardless of whether or not its personality is exactly what you wanted.

2) Are you comfortable handling an animal that may bite?

Being bitten is part of owning almost any animal, and it's something you have to be prepared to deal with. It certainly isn't fun, and it's fine to be a little nervous about it. But being worried about bites to the point where you won't even try to handle your hamster is a problem.

3) Are you able to get your hamster to an exotic vet?

Dogs and cats are not the only animals that need to go to the vet. Contrary to popular belief, yes, hamsters do need vet care! Your vet situation is something best sorted before you get a hamster, not afterwards. Do you have an exotic vet within a reasonable distance? Are you able to drive to the vet yourself, or will you need some other type of transportation? How much do exotic vets cost in your area (you can call to find out!) and is that within your budget? Do you have a job to pay for vet bills, or will someone else be helping out?

4) Are you financially comfortable and stable?

Hamsters are probably one of the least expensive pets to own. As much as a benefit as this may be, it can lull owners into a false sense of security and cause them to underestimate costs. Hamsters do cost money and require planning for future needs. Startup and maintenance costs must be planned and saved up for. What often causes problems is the "emergency expenses" - something breaks or is found to be unsuitable and needs to be replaced immediately. A very limited budget or tight financial situation can be a problem in situations like this. In general, taking care of a hamster is not going to require dropping hundreds of dollars at a moment's notice (excluding vet care). But you need to be in a good enough financial position to be able to buy things short-notice without having the opportunity to save up. If \$10 for a new wheel or \$20 for a bag of bedding is going to be an enormous financial hardship...then it may be worth reworking finances before getting a hamster.

5) Are you able to make arrangements if you travel?

Hamsters can certainly be left alone for a day or two, but anything longer than that is going to require boarding or a pet sitter. If you'll be taking the hamster somewhere, you also have to consider the habitat. Is it possible to move the cage, or will you have to relocate to a temporary enclosure? The bottom line is that you will need to have a plan for your hamster when you go on vacation or any other type of trip.

6) Is your lifestyle suited to caring for a primarily nocturnal animal?

Hamsters vary in sleep schedules, but are generally either nocturnal (active at night) or crepuscular (active around dawn and dusk). You cannot "train" hamster to be awake during the day. Typically, hamsters are not going to be awake for extended periods during the day, which could cut into taming and playtime. Also consider that the hamster will be awake and potentially making noise when you are trying to sleep! Make sure to evaluate if this type of behavior works with your schedule. This is especially important if you are a parent considering a hamster for your child. It is not uncommon for hamsters to sleep until midnight or later.

7) Is your household safe for a hamster?

If you have cats or dogs, are you able to have a very secure cage and/or keep the animals away from the cage? For young children, is it going to be possible for the child to get into the cage and take the hamster out unsupervised? Does your household use a lot of air fresheners or strong cleaning chemicals that could irritate a hamster's respiratory system? Does your house get extremely warm (above 80F) or extremely cold (below 60F)? If any of these things are issues, are you able to adjust them?

8) Is everyone in the household on board with getting a hamster and all that it entails?

Is anyone going to have issues with allergies or odors? What if the electric bill ends up being a bit higher to keep the hamster at a safe temperature? Is someone in the house afraid of rodents? If changes to habits have to be made, is everyone aware and okay with it?

9) Do you have space for a hamster and its supplies?

Hamsters are unique in that they require a lot of space relative to their body size. A proper hamster cage will be a piece of furniture in and of itself - not something that can fit on a small nightstand or desk. Make sure you have at least 3 - 4 square feet of space to accommodate the cage and supplies.

10) Are there any known major changes in your life approaching in the next 3 years?

Obviously, we can't predict every change in life, and things crop up suddenly. However, look ahead to the next few years in your life. If your family is going to be moving hours away in a few months, is now really a good time for a new pet? Is it a good idea to put a hamster through the stress of a move? If you're going to be graduating high school and going to college next year, what's going to happen to your hamster when you leave? Plan ahead to make sure your hamster is going to be happy and comfortable for its entire life.

Edited by Taxonomist, 02 April 2017 - 09:43 PM.