



Chapter 028, Management, Husbandry, and Colony Health (American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine)

Mark Suckow

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NOTE: This is a single chapter excerpted from the book *The Laboratory Rabbit, Guinea Pig, Hamster, and Other Rodents*, made available for individual purchase. Additional chapters, as well as the entire book, may be purchased separately.

This chapter provides a review of the management, husbandry, and colony health requirements of the Syrian or golden hamster, *Mesocricetus auratus*, used in biomedical research. Hamsters are rodents belonging within the family Crecetidae. Members of the Crecetidae family are characterized by large cheek pouches, relatively thick bodies, and a short tail. Hamsters are generally housed in cages that are appropriate for housing other laboratory rodents. Contemporary cages are generally made of commercially manufactured rigid plastic materials (i.e., polycarbonate, polysulfone, and polypropylene) or stainless steel. The chapter studies the environmental conditions required for a Syrian hamster, which include the ventilation, illumination, temperature, and humidity conditions. Hamsters are generally provided commercially produced pelleted rodent diet intended for mice and rats, and animals raised on such diets show normal growth and reproduction. The chapter studies the breeding and record keeping of hamsters. Sexual maturity in the hamster generally occurs at approximately 6 weeks (42 days) of age, although copulatory activity can begin as early as 4 weeks of age. Health records, also referred to as clinical records, can be maintained as group records for large populations, such as commercial breeding colonies, or as individual animal records. Health records should include pertinent clinical observations and diagnostic information, history of surgical procedures, postoperative care, and information on experimental use, as it pertains to clinical care of the animal.

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