

HEDGEHOG CARE GUIDE

Atelerix albiventris — African Pygmy Hedgehog

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

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You are now the caretaker of a tiny nocturnal explorer covered in defensive toothpicks and curiosity. Hedgehogs can be wonderful companions — when their environmental, nutritional, and medical needs are actually met.



BASIC HEDGEHOG FACTS

- African pygmy hedgehogs are naturally shy, solitary, and primarily active at night — plan your interactions accordingly

Stat	Males	Females
Lifespan	4–7 years	4–7 years
Adult length	~7 inches	~7 inches
Sexual maturity	2–6 months	2–6 months
Adult weight (African)	500–600 g	250–400 g
Adult weight (European)	800–1200 g	400–800 g



DIET & FEEDING

- Hedgehogs require a **high-protein, low-fat** diet — obesity is one of the most common and preventable health problems. Insectivore diets are best but many hedgehogs eat low-fat, high protein, chicken or meat-based cat food;
- Feed once daily in the late afternoon or evening — they are nocturnal and will eat overnight
- Offer portion sizes that are mostly eaten overnight — adjust as needed to maintain healthy weight
- Do not free-feed adults** — unlimited food access leads directly to obesity
- Introduce any diet changes gradually over several days — abrupt changes cause digestive upset
- Fresh water at all times via a heavy bowl or sipper bottle

Food	Amount	Notes
High-quality insectivore kibble (e.g. Mazuri)	3–4 teaspoons daily	Primary diet — non-negotiable
Root vegetables	Small portions	Supplemental enrichment
Insects (mealworms, crickets)	Occasional	Treat and enrichment only

- Never use dog food as the sole diet** — nutritionally incomplete for hedgehogs
- Avoid high-fat cat foods, high-fat treats and sugary foods entirely



HOUSING & ENVIRONMENT

- Minimum enclosure: equivalent to a 20-gallon tank or larger — at least **5 square feet per hedgehog**
- Smooth walls, escape-proof design — hedgehogs are determined climbers when motivated
- **Solid flooring only** — no wire bottoms, which cause foot and leg injuries

Parameter	Target
Ideal temperature	75–85°F (24–30°C)
Cold sensitivity	High — low temperatures can cause torpor or serious health complications
Supplemental heat	Often required — plan for it before you need it

- Hedgehogs are very sensitive to cold — decreased activity or appetite in cool conditions is a warning sign, not normal behavior

Safe bedding options:

- Recycled paper bedding, newspaper-based bedding, or washable fleece
- Bedding must be kept clean and dry at all times — damp bedding is a direct contributor to skin and respiratory problems



EXERCISE & ENRICHMENT

- Hedgehogs need daily activity to maintain healthy weight and mental stimulation — a bored hedgehog is an obese hedgehog
- **Solid-bottom exercise wheel** required — no wire wheels, which trap feet and cause injuries. Clean regularly.
- Hiding structures: boxes, tunnels, and logs — security matters as much as exercise
- Smooth rocks for rubbing and natural nail wear
- Climbing opportunities within the enclosure
- Hedgehogs are excellent climbers and surprisingly athletic nocturnal explorers — do not underestimate them



GROOMING & HANDLING

Handling:

- Handle daily using slow, gentle movements — consistency is what builds trust with a hedgehog
- Regular handling helps reduce fear and defensive behavior over time
- Rolling into a ball or hissing when startled is normal defensive behavior — wait them out patiently

Bathing:

- Provide occasional shallow warm water baths — not frequent, not cold
- Monitor closely during bathing — hedgehogs can tire quickly in water
- Dry thoroughly after bathing and maintain warm room temperature throughout — cold after a bath is dangerous



NORMAL HEDGEHOG BEHAVIOR

- Active primarily at night — daytime sleeping is normal, not lethargy
- Hiding and burrowing throughout the day
- Climbing and exploring after dark
- Curling into a tight ball when startled — this is a defensive reflex, not an emergency
- Anointing: foaming saliva and spreading it onto their spines after encountering a new smell — looks alarming, completely normal



VETERINARY CARE & HEALTH CONCERNS

- Veterinary examinations every 12 months — annual is the minimum, not the ceiling
- Routine dental evaluations and cleanings when recommended — dental disease is common and underdiagnosed
- Monthly weight checks at home — weight changes are often the first sign of illness in hedgehogs

Sign	What It May Indicate
Weight loss or obesity	Dietary issues, metabolic disease, or cancer
Reduced appetite	Dental disease, illness, or environmental stress
Diarrhea or abnormal stool	Infection, dietary change, or parasites
Skin problems, spine or hair loss, itching	Mites, fungal infection, or hormonal disease
Respiratory difficulty	Infection, heart disease, or environmental irritants
Eye injury or discharge	Infection or trauma — hedgehog eyes are prone to injury
Weakness, wobbling, or mobility problems	Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (WHS) or neurologic disease
Lethargy or behavior changes	Any number of conditions — warrants prompt evaluation

- Cancer and neurologic diseases such as Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome become more common as hedgehogs age — regular wellness exams are the best early detection tool available

Hedgehogs carry **Salmonella** bacteria without appearing ill. Always wash hands thoroughly after handling and keep hedgehogs away from food preparation surfaces. They are not recommended for households with very young children or immunocompromised individuals.

Questions? We've heard weirder ones. Call us.

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