Hedgehog Care Guide

15-page illustrated guide | Warm habitat, insectivore diet, wheel and preventive care



African pygmy hedgehogs are nocturnal insectivores with specific warmth, exercise and veterinary needs. Confirm that ownership is legal where you live before adopting.

A practical, species-specific guide for responsible ownership in the United States. Use it alongside an experienced small-mammal veterinarian and current local rules.

1 | Is a hedgehog right for you?

Pet African pygmy hedgehogs are solitary, nocturnal animals; they may be active while a household sleeps and can need patient socialization. Their lifespan is often several years. They are not cuddly daytime pets and require a warm stable environment and an exotic-pet veterinarian.

– Confirm state, county and city rules before acquiring one.

– Plan for nighttime wheel noise and regular cleaning.

– Consider an adult rescue animal with known temperament.

2 | Choose a healthy hedgehog

Look for bright clear eyes, clean nose and ears, smooth skin, steady walking, normal appetite and a clean underside. Ask about age, diet, weight, previous illness and whether the animal has had a veterinary exam. Avoid wild-caught hedgehogs; native wildlife laws and health risks apply.

– Ask a rescue or breeder to demonstrate safe handling.

– Arrange an exotic-vet visit soon after adoption.

– Do not house two adults together unless an expert gives an individual welfare plan.

3 | Secure enclosure and temperature

Provide a spacious, well-ventilated enclosure with a solid floor, hide, food and water dishes, and a solid running wheel. Hedgehogs need a warm, stable environment; cold conditions can trigger dangerous torpor-like states. Use a thermostat-controlled heat source only with safe setup and a thermometer.

– Avoid wire floors and wire exercise wheels.

– Keep away from drafts, direct sun and heat sources they can contact.

– Monitor temperature at animal level and ask the vet for a suitable range.

4 | Bedding and cleaning

Use paper bedding, fleece or another safe low-dust substrate; provide a separate sleeping hide and nesting material that cannot wrap around toes. Spot-clean urine and feces daily, particularly under the wheel, and clean food and water dishes. Inspect feet for fibers or hair tourniquets.

– Avoid cedar, aromatic shavings and loose stringy fibers.

– Wash bedding with unscented detergent and rinse thoroughly.

– Keep the enclosure dry and remove spoiled food.

5 | Insectivore nutrition

Feed a balanced hedgehog food or veterinarian-approved high-quality cat food with appropriate protein and fat, portioned to maintain a healthy body condition. Offer safe insects as enrichment and fresh water continuously. Avoid overfeeding, sugary treats, raw meat, milk and wild-caught insects.

– Weigh regularly; obesity is common in captive hedgehogs.

– Ask an exotic vet before using supplements or changing the main diet.

– Remove uneaten perishable food promptly.

6 | Wheel and enrichment

A solid-surface wheel large enough for comfortable running is essential. Add hides, tunnels, supervised exploration and safe scent-based foraging. Hedgehogs need a secure play area and close supervision; they can squeeze into gaps and chew unsafe items.

– Clean the wheel daily; droppings often collect on it.

– Avoid wire wheels, exercise balls and multi-level falls.

– Remove toys with sharp edges or openings that trap toes.

7 | Handling and bonding

Hedgehogs may curl up or raise their quills when startled. Let the animal wake naturally, offer a hand for scent investigation and scoop from underneath with a towel or gloved hands if needed. Keep sessions short and low over a soft surface. Never force unfolding or pull quills.

– Daily gentle contact helps build familiarity.

– Do not wake repeatedly during daytime.

– Children should be supervised and wash hands after contact.

8 | Bathing, nails and hygiene

Routine full-body bathing is not needed. A shallow warm foot bath may help remove stool from feet when necessary; dry the hedgehog thoroughly and keep it warm. Use a soft toothbrush and plain water for soiled quills only when needed. Nail trimming requires care; ask the vet to demonstrate.

– Avoid deep immersion, cold water, scented shampoo and frequent bathing.

– Do not use flea medicines or skin products without a vet.

– Check feet, nails, skin and ears regularly.

9 | Veterinary prevention and law

Schedule a new-pet exam and yearly wellness visits with an exotic-pet veterinarian. Discuss parasite checks, weight, oral health, skin and tumor screening. No routine vaccine schedule is universally established for pet hedgehogs. Ownership rules vary widely; verify current state and local regulations before adoption or travel.

– Keep records of weight, diet and any quill or skin changes.

– Confirm a 24-hour clinic can treat hedgehogs.

– For import, separate federal and state requirements apply; check USDA APHIS.

10 | Illness signs and emergencies

Seek prompt care for not eating, weight loss, diarrhea, blood in stool or urine, breathing changes, discharge, skin sores, severe itching, wobbling, weakness, difficulty unrolling or a cold body. Sudden collapse, seizures, severe bleeding or breathing distress are emergencies.

– Do not assume unrolling difficulty is only fear.

– Keep the hedgehog warm during transport without overheating.

– Never give human pain medicine or leftover antibiotics.

11 | Approximate U.S. costs

A secure enclosure, heat control, wheel and furnishings may cost $200–$600+ initially. Food, bedding and insects may add $30–$70 monthly. Routine exotic-vet exams commonly cost $60–$180+ depending on location, and diagnostics or surgery can cost much more. Ask local clinics for current quotes and maintain an emergency fund.

– Check insurance exclusions for exotic species and pre-existing conditions.

– Budget for climate control and backup heat monitoring.

– Ownership legality may affect travel and access to services.

12 | Children and household pets

Hedgehogs are solitary and nocturnal, so they may not suit children expecting a daytime playmate. Adults should handle feeding, cleaning and veterinary decisions. Dogs, cats and ferrets may injure or stress a hedgehog; keep interactions separated and secure the enclosure.

– Wash hands after handling; hedgehogs can carry Salmonella.

– Do not let a child kiss or bring the animal near the face.

– Avoid sharing bedding or equipment with other pets.

13 | Travel and seasonal safety

Arrange a knowledgeable sitter who can check heat, water, food and activity every day. Use a secure ventilated carrier with familiar bedding for vet visits. Avoid cold drafts, hot cars and rapid temperature changes. Before moving across state lines, confirm current ownership rules and transport requirements.

– Write down thermostat settings and emergency vet contacts.

– Prepare for power outages and heat-source failure.

– Never leave a hedgehog in a parked vehicle.

14 | First month checklist

Prepare the enclosure, thermostat-controlled heat, wheel, hide, food and vet contact before adoption. Keep the familiar diet and allow the animal to settle into a nighttime routine. Track weight, appetite, droppings, temperature and wheel use; arrange an initial health check.

– Daily: temperature, water, food intake, droppings and activity.

– Weekly: weight trend, feet, wheel safety and enclosure clean.

– Call the vet promptly if appetite or walking changes.

Sources and further reading

This is an original educational guide, not a reproduction of the requested book. The supplied eBay item number is included for reference; listing title, author, and edition could not be independently confirmed. Consult an experienced veterinarian for individual care decisions.

– User-supplied eBay listing

– Merck Veterinary Manual: Management of Four-Toed (African Pygmy) Hedgehogs

– USDA APHIS: Pet Hedgehog and Tenrec Imports into the US

– Royal Veterinary College: African Pygmy Hedgehog Care