

YOUR NEW BEST FRIEND: SMALL ANIMAL CARE CHECKLIST

Dedicated pet parents understand the importance of taking the best possible care of their furry family members. Unfortunately, the demanding schedules and frequent distractions that are such a common part of modern life can make it a challenge to keep track of your pet's daily care routine. By creating a daily care checklist for your small pets, you can ensure your fur babies' daily needs are met while also establishing a stress-limiting routine for all members of the household.

Why Are Pet Care Checklists Important?

Maintaining a daily routine is a great way to:

- Establish healthy habits
- Decrease stress for pet and pet parent alike
- Make sure important daily pet care tasks are completed timely and efficiently

Even if you already have an established daily routine, adding a pet care checklist is an easy way to provide a visual reminder to tasks that still need completed for the day and can help you track any trends that might otherwise go unnoticed. Although daily care checklists are recommended for all pet parents, they tend to be especially helpful for homes in which children or multiple individuals share in household pet care by making sure everyone in the home knows what tasks have been completed, and which are left to be done.

Make the Most of Your Family Schedule

Though not all aspects of daily exotic companion mammal care are appropriate for young children, adding pet care responsibilities to a child's daily routine can help them develop a sense of responsibility and allows them an opportunity to build a special, unique bond with their pets. The care and husbandry skills children learn throughout their formative years also help ensure they remain attentive, caring, and responsible pet parents for life, and will assist in developing basic time management skills and a sense of pride and independence. Anytime a child is helping care for a pet, it is important an adult ensures the tasks are completed safely and thoroughly, or (in the case of young children) under direct adult supervision.

Daily Small Pet Care Checklist

The list below outlines the daily needs of most small pets, but it is important to remember that individual pet's needs differ. Be sure to tailor your checklist and routine to best meet the specific needs of your furry friends.

Rinse and Refill Water Receptacle(s)

Empty any remaining water left in the vessel(s), rinse thoroughly, refill with fresh water, and replace. Though water bottles/bowls only need to be rinsed once a day, it is important to check on your pet's water supply every morning and every evening to ensure they always have water available. Children tend to enjoy helping with this task.

Wash and Dry Food Dish(es)

Empty any remaining food and wash food dishes with warm, soapy water. Dishes should be completely dry before more food is added. This is another excellent task for children to complete.



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Provide Species Appropriate Diet Options

For small herbivores, make sure your pet has an ample supply of fresh, clean, hay varieties available for the day. Check through any hay remaining in your pet's feeding station and discard any that has become damp or soiled. Add new hay as necessary, tossing gently to mix the older hay with the new hay. This task should be completed every morning and every evening to ensure your little ones always have an unlimited supply of clean hay available.

Once your pets' freshly cleaned food dish is dry, add their daily allotted volume of pellets or kibble.

For young animals or species who need an unlimited volume of food daily, make sure to check your pet's food dish every morning and every evening, adding food as necessary. For adult animals, or kiddos who are on a fixed daily volume, pet parents can choose to feed the entire volume at once or break it into a morning and evening feeding. Offer a daily assortment of species appropriate supplemental foods. Small herbivores are big fans of fresh greens, veggies, and fruits, while small omnivores appreciate the addition of grains and appropriate proteins along with their produce. All tasks above are excellent opportunities for small children to assist.

Administer Prescription Medications or Daily Supplements

A checklist is an easy way to make sure your pet gets their prescription medications on time and as directed. It is also a great way of tracking any prescription or over-the-counter supplements your pet is taking. Medications should always be administered by an adult.

Safety Check Enrichment Items

Thoroughly examine each of the enrichment items (chews, activity centers, hideouts, etc.) to which your little one has access. Once an enrichment item becomes frayed, heavily splintered, or begins to fall apart, remove it and replace with a new item. If you share your home with a free roam pet, this is also a great time to make sure shoes, clothes, mail, or other important or potentially dangerous items are picked up and out of reach of inquisitive little mouths. This is a great activity for children.

Spot Clean Enclosure and/or Litterbox

Keeping your pets in a tidy enclosure or environment helps ensure they remain healthy and limits any animal associated aromas around the home. Small mammals tend to prefer to urinate and defecate in the corners of their enclosures or under hiding spaces. Check the environment closely and remove any soiled litter or bedding with a scoop, replacing with fresh litter and bedding as needed. Even if your pets are immaculately litter trained, scooping their litterbox at least once daily is recommended. While spot cleaning, be on the lookout for oddly shaped fecal pellets, soft stools, or diarrhea, and note whether you see anything unusual about their urine (smaller volume, odd color, etc.). Any abnormalities should be promptly discussed with your veterinarian. It is important for children to assist with this task, as it impresses the importance of keeping your pets clean and tidy.

Social Hour

To avoid the boredom and monotony of exploring the same habitat day after day, it's important to allow your little ones' daily access to a pet-proof floor space where they can run, jump, explore and play. Daily floor time is also an excellent opportunity for pet parents to socialize and closely interact with their little ones.

Though free roam pets generally have room to roam and explore throughout the day, they also benefit from the additional attention social hour provides. Through play and affection, you can offer a unique opportunity to strengthen the human-animal bond while also ensuring your little one's physical and mental needs are being met. Because it serves as an opportunity to snuggle and connect with their little furry companions, children often look forward to daily social hour.

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Appropriate Grooming

Though not all small mammals require daily grooming, if you happen to have a long-haired breed you can generally look forward to a daily brushing routine. Long-haired breeds aren't the only kiddos who may need daily grooming attention, though. Little ones who are prone to ear infection often benefit from having their ears wiped out daily, and furry friends who have a history of messy bottoms (a common symptom of obesity) may need to have their back ends cleaned on a routine basis. If you aren't certain what daily grooming practices are appropriate for your pets, please speak with your trusted veterinarian.

Monitor General Well-Being

As prey species, small mammals are experts at hiding signs of illness or injury, meaning even the most observant pet parent can miss the subtle early signs of a brewing health concern. Monitoring your pet's appetite, behavior, activity level, and urinary/fecal output daily allows you to visually compare results from one day to the next, and easily note trends to discuss with your veterinarian.

Though not always necessary, if your pet is elderly or convalescing after a recent illness, injury, or surgery, monitoring their daily weight will help ensure they aren't losing or gaining weight at an alarming rate. Any significant trends or weight fluctuations should be addressed by a trusted exotics-savvy veterinarian.

More Than Daily Needs

Though the list above is a great overview of your pet's daily needs, your furry family members also have weekly and monthly requirements. Tasks such as deep cleaning your kiddo's enclosure and washing water bottles should be completed weekly, while nail trims and at home wellness exams should be completed monthly. If the daily pet care checklist helps establish a healthy routine, your household may also benefit from a similar weekly and/or monthly checklist for care tasks that don't need to be completed every day.

Despite busy schedules, keeping your small pets happy and healthy is at the forefront of every passionate pet parent's mind. Following a daily pet care checklist is a great way to get everyone involved in the care of household pets, establish a consistent routine, and ensure your pets have all that they need to live their best lives.

