



AFRICAN PYGMY HEDGEHOG **Diet and Care Recommendations**

GENERAL INFORMATION

The African pygmy hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*) is found in scattered local populations from Senegal in western Africa to southern Somalia and Tanzania. It can be found in semiarid forests, deserts, and dry savannas. Hedgehogs occasionally perform a ritual called anointing. When the animal comes across a new scent, it will lick and bite the source and then form a scented froth in its mouth and paste it on its spines with its tongue. It is not known what the specific purpose of this ritual is, but some experts believe anointing camouflages the hedgehog with the new scent of the area and provides a possible poison or source of infection to any predator that gets poked by their spines.

African pygmy hedgehogs are insectivores. They are nocturnal and can be found foraging for worms, snails, and arthropods. In captivity, these animals can live 3-5 years. They reach sexual maturity at 2 months. Hedgehogs love to burrow, nest, and hide.

DIET

Insectivore Diet: Give fresh, high-quality insectivore diet daily. We recommend the Mazuri Insectivore Diet. DO NOT feed hedgehogs cat food! Cat food leads to nutritional deficiencies and obesity.

Live Insects: Give an assortment of feeder insects such as crickets, hornworms, Phoenix worms, and dubia roaches. Avoid mealworms, waxworms, and superworms as these are low in nutrients and high in fat and phosphorus. Slugs and snails can also be used. We recommend Josh's Frogs and Rainbow Mealworms for ordering insects online.

Fruits and Vegetables: Can be offered occasionally. Hedgehogs enjoy edamame, bananas, and berries.



Dairy: DO NOT feed any dairy products! Hedgehogs cannot break down lactose. Although most hedgehogs will readily consume cheese, milk, and yogurt, consumption of these products can cause illness.

ENVIRONMENT

Cage: Single level cage with plastic bottom or large glass aquarium. Do not use cages with wire bottoms, as hedgehogs can get their feet caught in between the rungs. Hedgehogs need to be kept warm; use a programmable heat pad under one area of the enclosure. Do not use heat lamps as these can get too hot.

Substrate: Use paper-based bedding, such as Carefresh or Yesterday's News. Provide enough to allow burrowing. Don't use cedar or pine shavings. The oils in shavings can cause skin and respiratory irritation, and can also cause changes in liver function. Aspen shavings are okay but not recommended.

Moisture: Provide a water bottle or dish at all times and change the water daily. A pan or shallow tub filled with warm water can be provided for wading and swimming.

Furniture: Provide boxes for nesting and hiding. Many hedgehogs will use a rodent wheel. Use plastic wheels, as hedgehogs can get their feet caught between the rungs of wire wheels.

MEDICAL CARE

Bring hedgehogs in once a year for an annual health check. Wellness exams are important to ensure the overall wellbeing of the pet, as well as to catch any problems or diseases early.

Common Illnesses:

- a) **Quill mites:** Symptoms include: excessive itching, dandruff, and loss of quills. These mites can be visible to the naked eye, appearing as white dots at the base of quills. Treatment usually involves administering a bi-monthly, injectable antiparasitic medication.
- b) **Obesity:** Caused by improper diet (i.e. cat food). Condition is reversed by feeding an appropriate hedgehog diet or by limiting food intake. Discuss any potential diet change with a veterinarian.
- c) **Dental disease:** Gingivitis, periodontitis. Symptoms include: drooling, difficulty eating, and weight loss. Anesthesia is required for proper examination of the mouth. Tooth extraction may be required.
- d) **Foreign body:** Foot and/or toe constriction. Usually caused by string or hair that becomes wrapped around the appendages. Symptoms include: swollen, red, or blackened appendages. Treatment usually involves anesthesia, wrapping the injured area, and administering an oral antibiotic.
- e) **Squamous cell carcinoma:** Cancer of the mouth (jaws and dentition). Symptoms include: drooling, difficulty eating, weight loss, and abnormal lumps or tissue in the mouth. Anesthesia is required for proper examination of the mouth. Surgery may be required.
- f) **Intestinal parasites:** Symptoms include: inability to gain weight, diarrhea, weight loss, and lethargy. Hedgehogs exhibiting no symptoms may also be infected with parasites. Diagnosis is obtained by testing a fecal sample. Treatment involves administering an oral antiparasitic medication.

Bring your hedgehog to a veterinarian right away if it is showing any of the following symptoms:

**Loss of appetite
Diarrhea
Rapid or difficulty breathing
Weight loss
Extreme lethargy**