

# Evergreen Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital

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## Hedgehog Faqs

-Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM

Our pet hedgehog is also called the African pygmy hedgehog, West African hedgehog, White-bellied hedgehog or Four-toed hedgehog. It's Latin name is: *Atelerix albiventris*. It comes in a variety of colors now, based on the ticking of the quills. The wild type has black with white-tipped quills. White and gray/brown ticked quills = "Salt & Pepper"; all white quills = "Snowflake". There may be mixes of these as well as a reddish color with white ticked spines that I believe is called a Cinnamon. New colors are being bred.

**Behavior:** Hedgehogs are nocturnal and therefore are most active in the evenings. If allowed to run in the house, they tend to hide in corners or under furniture. Many hedgehogs may dig in carpets or in houseplants and dirt if accessible. They will forage for spiders and insects in the home. They urinate and defecate as they run, so running loose in the house may leave a trail. Most hedgehogs prefer quiet, dim environments and may react with fright at loud noises or bright sunlight. While young hedgies do not mind being held, many adults resist handling and struggle to be let loose, especially the males. Most will allow handling if they were handled a lot as babies. Very few bite, but they puff up. Some adults make a hissing sound particularly as they puff up. They are solitary animals except for mating, and usually must be housed separately even if raised with a same-sex littermate. Their courtship may be noisy and prolonged. When encountering something new in the environment, a hedgie may "taste" it, then begins hypersalivating and create a foam, which is then spit onto itself. The process is called "anting" or "anointing" Most owners will promptly rinse or bathe the hedgie to get rid of the material.

**Diets:** Free-ranging wild hedgehogs are insectivore/omnivores. Captive diets should be fairly high in protein and low in fat, and often based on zoo diet formulations. Cat or dog foods alone do not seem to be adequate as the sole diet component. These diets are notoriously too high in fat and grains. Commercial complete hedgehog diets are available in the pet trade, although most have not been critically evaluated with extensive feeding trials. To introduce individuals to new diets, mix new foods gradually into the old. It helps to have all chunks or pieces of the new and the old diet the same size and relative consistency. To minimize obesity, ad lib feeding of adults should be discouraged. Feed at night. This portion should be almost completely consumed by morning. Only a small amount of food needs to be present during the day for a snack. Ideally the portion fed at night is totally consumed, and the adult hedgehog should not snack during the day. Younger hedgies may eat an adult quantity, depending on their stage of life and activity. It is alright to have food available at all times for the young, growing hedgie. Water should be available at all times. Many hedgehogs will use a water bottle or may drink from a low dish or crock.

The clinic carries **Reliable Protein Products Insectivore Diet** that can be the basis of all hedgehog diets.

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**Diet Choice #1** (for one adult hedgehog per 24 h)

3-4 teaspoons commercial Insectivore Diet

5-6 mealworms or 1-2 crickets

**Diet Choice #2** (for one adult hedgehog per 24 h)

3 heaping tsp high quality cat/kitten chow or commercial hedgehog diet

1 heaping tsp fruit/vegetable mix\*

6 small mealworms or 1-2 crickets

\*fruit/vegetable mix: chop together with very small bits various fruits and vegetables. Example apple, carrot, pea, green bean, seedless grape, mango, papaya, squash (cooked), broccoli, spinach (cooked). The idea is a kind of succotash so that the hedgehog cannot pick out just the favorite pieces but has to eat it entirely.

**Diet Choice #3** (for one adult hedgehog of 500 g body weight per 24 h)

1 heaping teaspoon of bird of prey diet or insectivore diet

1.5 heaping tsp. high quality cat/kitten chow

1 heaping tsp fruit/vegetable mixture (see diet #2)

6-10 small mealworms or 1-2 crickets (more if pregnant or lactating)

**Diet Choice #4** (for one adult hedgehog per 24 h)

2-3 Tablespoons dry reduced calorie cat food or mix of dry & canned cat food

1-2 Tablespoons mixed frozen vegetables

3-5 insects (like crickets) 3-4 X a week

Can offer limited quantities (1-2 teaspoons 3-4 x per week max) baby food, hard-boiled egg, wax worms, pinky mice, earthworms (commercially bred)).

**Diet #5 Woodland Park Zoo, Seattle Diet**

Feeds several adults, can be mixed up and frozen or refrigerated.

1 tablespoon **Insectivore Diet**, 1 tablespoon fruit mix, 1 slice cooked carrot, 5 crickets, 30 small mealworms, 1 slice cooked yams, 1 pinch chopped romaine or leaf lettuce.

**Insectivore Diet:** 1 cup chopped non-domestic feline diet (frozen Nebraska brand), 1 cup chopped hard-boiled egg, 1 tablespoon wheat germ flakes, 1 teaspoon powdered milk, ½ teaspoon Vionate vitamin mineral powder, 2 teaspoons wheat germ oil. Mix all together.

**Fruit mix** (dice and mix together): 2 medium sized apples (peeled), 1 orange, 1 small tomato, ½ melon, ½ papaya, ½ cup carrots, ½ cup yams, ½ cup blueberries, ½ cup raisins, ½ cup sunflower seeds (shelled, nonsalted).

**For younger or pregnant/lactating hedgehogs** use kitten chows; **adults** use adult cat food and for many use a low fat cat food “Lite” types. Best however is to use an insectivore diet or one formulated for hedgehogs.

**Housing:** Hedgehogs need a smooth-walled enclosure that is high enough to prevent escapes. Aquariums 20 gallons or larger are acceptable. There are a number of specialty cages

available in the pet trade. These allow for mounting or holding a large hedgehog exercise wheel. Hedgehogs enjoy running in the wheel, but urinate and defecate as they run, so the wheel has to be cleaned daily. These wheels are specific for hedgehogs. Do not use wheels designed for rats as the hedgehog may get caught in wire surfaces. Most hedgies enjoy having a nestbox, usually in an area of the cage where there is more heat. Heat can be supplied via a ceramic heat emitter, where an area of the cage is maintained at 80-85 degrees F. A pan or shallow tub (warm water, warm ambient temperature) may be provided for swimming as some hedgies enjoy this activity. For bathing use a gentle kitten shampoo with warm water. Be sure to rinse well, and keep in warmed area to dry.

**Quick Facts:**

<b>Physiologic</b>	
Life Span	3-5 years (6-10 years recorded in captivity)
Adult male body weight	500-600 g
Adult female body weight	250-400 g
Rectal temperature	36.1-37.2 deg C (97-99 deg F)
GI tract	Simple stomach, no cecum
Hibernation	Do not hibernate
Dentition	36:3.1.3.3
<b>Reproductive</b>	
Sexual maturity	> 2 months old
Breeding	Year-round
Gestation length	34-37 days
Litter size	1-7 pups (avg 3)
Cannibalism	Common if female is stressed, disturbed. Remove male prior to parturition
Birth weight	8-13 g (depending on litter/dam size. Avg 10 g)
Spines develop	Within 24 hours
Eyes open	13-16- days of age
Weaning	4-6 weeks of age
Orphan milk replacement	Puppy or kitten milk replacement

**Common Clinical Conditions:**

- Obesity
- Dental disease, gingivitis, periodontitis, oral tumors
- Neoplasia: squamous cell carcinoma particularly of the mouth; liver tumors. High tumor rate in those over 3 yrs of age
- Salmonella
- Trauma
- Dermatitis (mange mites, fungal, bacterial)
- Fatty liver
- Pneumonia