



## **Pygmy Hedgehog Care Guide**

African pygmy hedgehogs are nocturnal, solitary exotic mammals with very specific care needs. They are not low-maintenance pets and require careful temperature control, specialist diet, and experienced handling to thrive.

This guide is designed to help potential and existing owners understand the commitment involved and ensure hedgehogs are kept to high welfare standards.

### **Housing & Environment**

#### **Enclosure Size**

Recommended minimum enclosure size:  
120cm (L) × 60cm (W) × 50cm (H)

Larger enclosures are strongly encouraged. Hedgehogs are active walkers and need wide, uninterrupted floor space, not height.

#### **Enclosure Requirements**

A suitable enclosure must provide:

- A solid base (no wire or mesh flooring)
- Good ventilation without draughts
- Secure sides (hedgehogs can climb surprisingly well)

- Easy access for cleaning

Common suitable setups include:

- Large vivarium-style enclosures
- Modified indoor pens with solid flooring

Glass tanks without adequate ventilation or small cages are not suitable.

#### **Temperature & Heating (CRITICAL)**

Pygmy hedgehogs are highly sensitive to temperature.

- Ideal temperature range: 23–26°C
- Temperatures below 20°C can cause hibernation attempts, which are life-threatening in captive hedgehogs

A safe setup should include:

- A ceramic heat emitter or suitable heat source
- A thermostat to regulate temperature
- A thermometer at hedgehog level



Heat mats alone are not sufficient and can cause burns if used incorrectly.

## **Bedding & Nesting**

### **Suitable Bedding**

Use soft, absorbent, dust-free bedding such as:

- Paper-based bedding
- Fleece liners (washed regularly)
- Shredded paper

### **Avoid:**

- Wood shavings (especially pine or cedar)
- Straw or hay
- Cat litter
- Anything scented or dusty

## **Hygiene & Cleaning**

- Spot-clean daily
- Full enclosure clean weekly
- Wash fleece bedding frequently
- Disinfect using pet-safe products only

Good hygiene is essential for preventing illness.

## **Enrichment & Exercise**

Hedgehogs require daily opportunities to exercise.

### **Essential Enrichment**

- Large solid running wheel
  - Minimum 28–30cm diameter
  - Solid surface (no bars or mesh)
- Tunnels and tubes
- Safe foraging opportunities
- Supervised out-of-enclosure exploration

### **Nesting & Hides**

Hedgehogs need secure hiding areas to feel safe.

Provide:

- At least one enclosed sleeping hide
- Nesting material such as:
  - Shredded paper
  - Unscented tissue



## **Temperament & Behaviour**

Pygmy hedgehogs are typically:

- Solitary and should always be housed alone
- Nocturnal — most active at night
- Naturally cautious and defensive
- Curious once confident, but easily stressed

Hedgehogs are prey animals. When frightened or overwhelmed, they may:

- Curl into a tight ball
- Hiss or puff
- Become reluctant to uncurl

With gentle, consistent handling, many hedgehogs learn to tolerate interaction, but they should never be forced to interact. They are best suited to calm homes with adults or older children who understand animal body language.

### **Exercise helps prevent:**

- Obesity
- Muscle loss
- Boredom-related stress



## **Diet & Nutrition**

Pygmy hedgehogs are insectivores, not rodents.

### **Core Diet**

The main diet should be:

- A high-quality insectivore-appropriate diet
- High in protein
- Low in fat
- Low in sugar

Many rescues use a carefully selected staple diet alongside insects.

### **Insects (Essential)**

Live or dried insects should be offered regularly, such as:

- Mealworms (limited due to fat)
- Crickets
- Locusts
- Beetle larvae

Insects provide:

- Natural foraging behaviour
- Essential nutrients
- Mental stimulation

### **Fresh Foods (Small Amounts)**

Occasional additions may include:

- Cooked, unseasoned chicken or turkey
- Scrambled or boiled egg (plain)
- Small amounts of safe vegetables

### **Avoid:**

- Fruit
- Milk or dairy
- Bread
- Sugary or fatty foods
- Dog or cat food not suitable for insectivores

Fresh water must always be available in a shallow, heavy bowl.



## **Health & Welfare**

Hedgehogs require access to an exotic-experienced vet.

**Daily checks** should include:

- Appetite and activity levels
- Weight (weekly monitoring recommended)
- Movement and posture
- Skin and spine condition

### **Common Health Concerns**

- Obesity
- Dental disease
- Skin issues (mites, dry skin)
- Respiratory illness
- Wobbly Hedgehog Syndrome (genetic)



Any signs of lethargy, weight loss, or behaviour change require prompt veterinary attention.

## **Is a Pygmy Hedgehog Right for You?**

Pygmy hedgehogs are best suited to homes that:

- Can maintain stable, warm temperatures year-round
- Have access to an exotic vet
- Understand nocturnal animals
- Are comfortable with limited handling
- Are committed to specialist care

They may not be suitable for:

- Homes without temperature control
- Very young children
- People seeking a cuddly or daytime-active pet

Pygmy hedgehogs can thrive in captivity only when their specialist needs are fully met. They are rewarding animals for the right homes but require a high level of commitment and understanding.

This guide follows current UK welfare guidance and rescue-level best practice.

## **Before You Adopt a Pygmy Hedgehog**

Pygmy hedgehogs are specialist exotic pets and are not suitable for every home. Before adopting, please ensure you can meet the following needs.

You should consider a pygmy hedgehog if you:

- Can maintain a stable temperature of 23–26°C year-round
- Are comfortable caring for a nocturnal animal
- Have access to an exotic-experienced vet
- Are happy with limited handling
- Can provide a large, ground-space enclosure
- Understand they are solitary animals

A pygmy hedgehog may not be right for you if you:

- Cannot control room temperature
- Are seeking a cuddly or daytime-active pet
- Have very young children
- Are unable to commit to specialist care and costs

Pygmy hedgehogs can thrive in the right home, but only when their specific welfare needs are fully met.