



# Milwood Animal Clinic

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## Degus

*There are quite a few sources of information on pet care available over the internet, some of which offer correct information. Others sources can be incorrect and harmful to your pet. Please consult with your veterinarian before making lifestyle, feeding, handling or caging changes.*



*Small caged pets can be wonderful companions and learning experiences for children. However, young children should not be assigned full time caretaker duties. A missed meal or a lack of water to drink can be life-threatening for small animals that must have a constant supply of food and hydration available to survive. Plan on supervising your children's care of their pet every day.*

## Natural History

The degu is a rodent endemic to the Mediterranean forests, woodlands and scrublands of central Chile. They are small, brownish animals, about 12 inches in length, with long, thin tails with a tufted black tips and smallish, sparsely furred ears. Degus are classified in the same order as chinchillas and guinea pigs. They are extremely social animals, living in the wild in large, burrowing communities.

Degus have a wide array of communication techniques including many unique sounds and urine scent marking. They are diurnal (active during the day) and have well developed eyesight. Degu pups are born after 90 days of gestation, fully furred and with their eyes open; litter size can be from 2 to up to twelve. All the adult members of the degu community participate in the rearing of the young, and females will even nurse each others' pups.

## Degus as Pets

Degus are incredibly social and curious animals, which can make them good pets, but they do have their drawbacks. Due to their nature, they enjoy interaction and exercise, and if not given an outlet for that, they can become aggressive and anxious.

Degus, if handled consistently from a young age, can be incredibly tame and want attention and scratches. Do NOT pick up a degu by its tail. They can "slip" their tail, which is incredibly painful and the tail won't come back.

## Housing & Enrichment

Degus need a large habitat to forage in. A cage that is 24in by 18in by 24in is recommended for two degus (due to their social nature, more than one is recommended). Multi-level cages are preferred for more degus and to allow more exercise and exploration. An aquarium is NOT appropriate.



Degus can and will chew, so do not use plastic enclosures or wood as they will escape. Wood blocks can be placed in the cage for enrichment, however, along with other chew toys designed for rodents. Mineral blocks designed for rodents can also be used safely.

A nesting box should be used in the cage for a degu to burrow in and sleep in. Appropriate bedding include paper or hay. This is less irritating than wood bedding and easier to clean.

An exercise wheel is an absolute must, given their activity. These guys love to run, and need a solid surface wheel to do it on as wire wheels can cause injury. A wheel with an 11 in diameter is recommended.

Similar to Chinchillas, they need a dust bath bi-weekly. This can be done by placing a shallow bowl into the cage with an inch of chinchilla dust. Compared to many other exotic animals, they do not smell.

### **Diet**

Degus are similar to other small rodents in that they need a combination of hay and pellets. Roughage should be available at all times, while the pellet should be a high-quality chinchilla or guinea pig pellet. Treats can include sunflower seeds, carrots, sweet potato, or whole nuts in a shell. These should be fed sparingly due to the risk of obesity and/or diabetes.

Fresh grass can also be offered as a treat (if it hasn't been treated with anything), and they will also happily use this as bedding.

Water should always be available, and to help with cleaning, keep the water in a bottle compared to a dish. Food should be fed in a non-chewable container.

Fruits should not be given.

### **Common Health Issues & What to expect at a vet visit**

Degus should be seen once a year and have a fecal checked as well. Due to their risk of diabetes, annual blood work should also be performed. Exotic veterinary clinics should have the capabilities of drawing blood, however, it may be in the animals' best interest (and safest) to have sedation on board while drawing blood.

At an examination, a full physical should be performed, including an oral examination. Due to their rodent nature, teeth should be checked for issues. Similar to many other animals (and humans), regular dental care may be necessary and they may need their teeth trimmed if not kept short. Foliage can help maintain proper oral health, hence why it should always be available.

A degu who is not eating should be seen by a veterinarian as soon as possible.

