

## FEEDING GERBILS, RATS & MICE

Most children, at some time or another, have a small pet such as a hamster or a rat. Unfortunately, the health of these much-loved little animals is often not as good as it could be, because of the diet they are fed.

### Hamsters

You may think when buying a pet hamster that a bag of 'hamster mix' off the shelf contains what a hamster needs - unfortunately it doesn't!

Most commercial hamster mixes are a mixture of dried seeds and grains, with a total protein level of 12 – 13%. If you compare this with the pelleted diets that are manufactured to keep laboratory hamsters in perfect condition, you find that the pelleted diet contains 18-20% protein, includes animal as well as vegetable protein, and contains extra vitamins and minerals.

### Other similar species

In the wild all these small rodents are *omnivores* rather than *herbivores* which means that they catch and eat insects and other invertebrates as well as eating fresh fruits and seeds.

### How to feed our small pets when we can't get hold of laboratory animal pellets?

Try any of the following:

- Complete cat food: include some dry in the usual mix to supply protein.
- Fruit and vegetables: feed every day a little of whatever the humans are having.
- Meat, cheese or yoghurt: another way of adding protein - feed small pieces or let your pet lick out the yoghurt pots!
- Your dinner: give your pet a helping of your dinner every evening! So long as you eat a reasonably healthy diet, it'll be all right for him or her too!
- Supplements: if you're worried about your pet's diet and its health, ask your vet about suitable supplements - many hamster mixes, as well as being low in protein, are also deficient in calcium, fat soluble vitamins and the essential fatty acids that are important for good coat condition.