

Caring For Your Sugar Glider

Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center
4001 Legato Rd, Suite 200
Fairfax, Virginia 22033
703.654.3100 Voice
703.654.3109 Fax



Caring for Sugar Gliders

Basic Husbandry

General Information

Vital Statistics

- Average Body Weight: Females 80–130g
Males 100–160g
- Life Span: 7–14 years
- Sexual Maturity: Female 8–12 months
Male 12–14 months

Behavior and Handling

- Sugar gliders are social animals and require sufficient attention. They can be time consuming pets, requiring at least 2 hours of socialization per day.
- Basic handling is best achieved at night, when these animals are interactive and playful.
- While gliders enjoying cuddling in shirt pockets or pouches, special consideration should be taken when this is allowed because of the risk of injury.
- If children are handling the sugar glider, have them sit on the floor and hold the pet in their lap. Only allow them to handle the pet with adult supervision!
- Advantages of sugar gliders as pets include their small size, playfulness and intelligence. Disadvantages include their nocturnal nature, housing requirements, specific dietary needs and musky odor.

Reproductive information

- Both male and female sugar gliders have a unique reproductive system which may lend them to special reproductive problems, especially when joined with obesity or inappropriate social situations.
- Litters commonly consist of only 1–2 joeys.
- The estrous cycle of the female is 29 days long and the gestation period is 15–17 days.
- Females have a special pouch where their young reside for 70–74 days, and then they are left in the nest until they are weaned at 110–120 days.

Housing

- Sugar gliders require a large amount of space and do best in a cage at least 16 times their body length and at least 1.8 meters high.
- Wire spacing should be less than 1 square inch to prevent escape.
- Branches from nontoxic trees should be made available for climbing
- The ideal temperature range for housing sugar gliders is between 75 and 80 °F.
- They should be allowed permanent access to a nesting box for sleeping and hiding during the day, with bedding consisting of recycled paper substrate.
- The cage should have designated areas for food, water, shelter and exercise.

- These animals enjoy a variety of objects to entertain them such as bird toys and plastic wheels without open rungs.

Diet

- Since sugar gliders are omnivores, captive diets should include a variety of protein sources, nectar, insects and a minimal amount of fruits and vegetables.
- Commercial diets for sugar gliders and insectivores are available at pet stores and over the internet.
- In addition to commercial diets, other protein sources may include mealworms, crickets, egg, and newborn mice.
- A lead beater's formula consisting of 150 ml water, 150 ml honey, one shelled hard-boiled egg, 25 g of high-protein baby cereal and one teaspoon of vitamin/mineral mixture can be fed daily.
- Leafy green vegetables may provide a good source of fiber and vitamins as well as other fruits, vegetables and seeds; however, since this is not a significant component of their natural diet, these treats should constitute less than 5–10% of the captive diet.
- A broad spectrum vitamin or calcium supplement may be recommended by your veterinarian. Please consult your veterinarian before starting a supplement.
- Fruit based diets are harmful to sugar gliders and provide inadequate protein and calcium predisposing them to osteoporosis and dental disease.
- A simplified diet has been proposed as 50% commercial insectivore diet, 50% lead beater's mixture and treats consisting of less than 5% of the daily intake.
- Acceptable treats may include diced fruits, bee pollen and gut-loaded insects.
- Fresh water should be offered daily.

Medical conditions

Conditions Requiring Veterinary Attention

Malnutrition

- Malnutrition is a common condition in sugar gliders because of misinformation of dietary requirements.
- Common conditions associated with malnutrition include low protein, low calcium and low red blood cell count.
- Malnourished sugar gliders may be lethargic, thin, dehydrated and are often at risk for seizures, pathologic fractures and infection.
- Treatment involves supportive care and correction of the underlying dietary problems.

Obesity

- Obesity is common in many captive sugar gliders fed a diet too high in fat or protein and a lack of exercise.
- Obesity can lead to diseases of the heart, liver and pancreas. It can also cause fat deposits to form on the eyes, especially in juveniles if the mother is fed a diet high in fat.
- Treatment consists of increasing exercise and change in diet.

Stress

- Stress in sugar gliders can result in self-mutilation of tail, limbs, scrotum and penis.
- Sexual frustration may be factor and castration is recommended for sexually mature males.
- Increased steroid production from stress may also result in hair loss.
- Providing proper nutrition and hygiene, normal social groupings, appropriate nesting areas and protection from potential predatory animals can help reduce stress.

Trauma

- Trauma, including bite wounds from dogs and cats, are common and potentially fatal injuries for sugar gliders.
- Gliders can also be injured by household activities such as falling from heights, chewing on electrical cords, or being stepped on.
- Eye injuries are also common because of the way their eyes slightly protrude. Corneal scratches and conjunctivitis are the most common eye injuries in sugar gliders.

Parasites

- Various parasites including tapeworms, lice, mites, fleas and intestinal worms are potential problems for sugar gliders, especially those allowed outdoor access. A fecal exam can be helpful in diagnosing some of these parasites.
- Marsupials are also susceptible to *Toxoplasma gondii*, an infectious disease, which may cause neurologic signs and sudden death. Prevent infection by eliminating exposure to feed or bedding contaminated with cat feces.

Tumors

- Cancer of lymphoid tissues such as cutaneous lymphosarcoma is relatively common in captive sugar gliders.
- Treatment may consist of surgical removal of the tumors and immunosuppressive drugs, however, the tumors may return.

Emergency / Critical Care

All emergencies require veterinary assistance. Use the following guidelines to assist you in caring for your sugar glider until you can contact a veterinarian.

Traumatic Injuries

Broken bones

- Provide your pet with soft bedding, such as a towel, blanket or sheep skin.
- Minimize handling.
- Keep your pet in a warm, dark and quiet area.
- Keep your pet as calm as possible and contact a veterinarian or local animal emergency clinic immediately

Skin injuries/Blood loss

- For any type of injury with blood loss, use direct pressure with a towel or clean gauze to prevent further blood loss. Contact your veterinarian immediately, especially if you are unable to stop the bleeding.

Head Injuries

- Provide your pet with soft bedding.
- Minimize handling.
- Keep your pet in a cool, dark and quiet area.
- Keep your pet as calm as possible and contact your veterinarian or local animal emergency clinic as soon as possible.

Severe Illnesses

Respiratory Distress

- If your sugar glider experiences open mouth breathing or gasping for air, remove all bedding and minimize handling and stress.
- Keep your pet in a quiet, cool, dark area until you are able to reach your veterinarian or local animal emergency clinic.

Health Recommendations

Yearly Physical Exam

- All newly acquired sugar gliders should have an initial exam. During the exam the veterinarian will check eyes, ears, heart, lungs and abdomen. The veterinarian will also check for external parasites such as lice and mites. A fecal exam should be performed to check for intestinal parasites. Please provide a fresh fecal sample at each exam.
- All sugar gliders should receive a health exam once a year.

Over-the-counter Medication

- Over-the-counter medications are not recommended without first consulting your veterinarian. Products such as triple antibiotic ointment (for the use of minor skin injuries) can cause digestive problems if ingested and can potentially become toxic over time.

Directions to Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center

From Manassas and areas west of Fairfax:

- From Manassas and areas west of Fairfax, take I-66 east. From I-66 east, take exit number 57-B, Route 50 west. From Route 50, exit onto West Ox Road south. Turn left at the second stoplight onto Legato Road. From Legato Road, take a left at the first stop sign, which is also Legato Road. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the end of Legato Road.

From Reston, Herndon, Sterling and Leesburg areas:

- From Reston, Herndon, Sterling and Leesburg areas, take Reston Parkway south to West Ox Road south. Once you pass the exit for Route 50, get in the far left lane and turn left onto Legato Road. From Legato Road, take a left at the first stop sign, which is also Legato Road. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the end of Legato Road.

From Springfield:

- From Springfield, take the Fairfax County Parkway north. Turn right onto Fair Lakes Parkway. From Fair Lakes Parkway, turn left onto Legato Road just before the entrance to Fair Oaks Mall. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the dead end of Legato Road.

From Alexandria, Richmond, and areas south of Fairfax:

- From Alexandria, Richmond, and areas South of Fairfax, take the I-495 inner loop to I-66 west. From I-66, exit onto Route 50 west, exit number 57-B. From route 50, exit onto West Ox Road south. Turn left at the second stoplight onto Legato Road. From Legato Road, take a left at the first stop sign, which is also Legato Road. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the end of Legato Road.

From Washington, DC:

- From Washington, D.C., take Constitution Avenue west to I-66 west. From I-66, exit onto Route 50 west, exit number 57-B. From route 50, exit onto West Ox Road south. Turn left at the second stoplight onto Legato Road. From Legato Road, take a left at the first stop sign, which is also Legato Road. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the end of Legato Road.

From Rockville, Silver Spring, and areas north of Fairfax:

- From Rockville, Silver Spring, and areas north of Fairfax, take the I-495 outer loop to I-66 west. From I-66 west, exit onto Route 50 west, exit number 57-B. From route 50, exit onto West Ox Road south. Turn left at the second stoplight onto Legato Road. From Legato Road, take a left at the first stop sign, which is also Legato Road. Follow Legato Road to the end. Eastern Exotic Veterinary Center is at the end of Legato Road.