

DEGUS

Natural history

Degus, also known as brush-tailed or trumpet-tailed rats, are natives of central Chilean open scrubland where they are routinely exposed to droughts. Degus survive on very poor diets in the wild.



Taxonomy

Class Mammalia

Order
Rodentia

Suborder Hystricomorpha

Family Octodontidae

Diet

Wild degus feed on grasses, seeds, cactus fruits, tubers, and local crops.

The captive diet should consist of rodent chow low in sugar (devoid of cane molasses) such as guinea pig or chinchilla pellets supplemented with green vegetables, and free-choice grass hay. Avoid fresh fruit and other sugar-rich foods such as corn, peas, and potatoes.

Degus normally drink very little water.

Husbandry

Degus are diurnal to crepuscular.

Cage furniture/
enrichment:

Degus are very active. Provide a wheel, PCV tubing for burrowing, and a hide box. Provide small nylabones, paper towel rolls, and pine cones for chewing. Hang small, sturdy branches across the cage for climbing and chewing.

branches across the cage for climbing and chewing. Also provide ladders and ramps for climbing. Provide a dust bath

at least twice a week.

Numbers:

Degus are social animals that may be housed in same-sex pairs. Singly housed individuals may develop stereotypies, depression, or barbering without a lot of owner attention.

Temperature:

Degus easily succumb to heat stress at temperatures > 86°F.

Normal physiologic values

Temperature

100.9°F

Body weight

170-300 g

Adult male

275 g

Adult female

250 g

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Mean life span 5-9 years (Should live 8+ years)
Sexual maturity 75 days

Normal physiologic Values

Gestation 87-93 days (90 days)
Litter size 3-11 (5-6)
Weaning age 4-6 weeks

Anatomy/physiology

Gastrointestinal Dental formula: I (1/1) C (0/0) PM (1/1) M (3/3)
Incisors are yellow to orange in color due to iron pigments. Molars are deeply enfolded giving them a "figure 8" appearance.

Urogenital: As in chinchillas, the vaginal is normally closed with a thin membrane. Both sexes have a cone appendage or genital papilla used for urination. In females, the distance between the anus and urethral cone is very short.
The testicles are intra-abdominal .

Special Senses: Degus possess a good sense of sight, hearing, and smell.

Restraint

Most degus can be easily handled by encircling the middle with one hand and the tail base with the other.
NEVER pick a degu up by the tail as they can shed their tails.

Preventive medicine

To minimize the risk of diabetes mellitus, avoid fruit and high-carb vegetables, and maintain a healthy body weight (no more than 250 g for females, 275 g for males).

Important medical conditions

Cataracts
Diabetes mellitus
Obesity

Antibiotics to Avoid

Avoid antimicrobials that attack only gram-positive bacteria such as beta-lactams.
P.L.A.C.E.:

- Penicillin
- Lincosamide, lincomycin

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- Amoxicillin, ampicillin
- Cephalosporins, clindamycin
- Erythromycin

Resources

Degus - a complete pet owners manual by Sharon Vanderlip DVM. Barrons, ISBN 0-7641-1600-2

Najecki D et al. Husbandry and management of the degu. Lab Anim 28(3):54-62, 1999

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