

The Degu

Everything You Need To Know About the Fabulous Degus!



The Pet Degu



Everything You Need to Know

By

Natural Pet Health Blog

<http://www.natural-pet-care.com/natural-pet-health-blog/>

What Is A Degu...and Why Would You Want One?

If you want a pet that is highly sociable, and extremely cute, you might want to consider the Degu. They have the sweetest personalities, and live for as long as 13 years. These creatures are also surprisingly intelligent.

Degus do not take the place of dogs or cats for many people. However, if you are considering a rabbit, a hamster, or a mouse as a pet, you might want to give serious consideration to the Degu, as the Degu is more sociable than any of these other animals.

So, what exactly is a Degu?

A Degu, scientifically known as the Octodon Degus, is actually a small rodent – although it is not a member of the rat family. It has a beautiful bushy tail, and may be referred to as the Common Degu. The Degu is related to the Guinea Pig and the Chinchilla.

Degu's originate from South America. These animals are awake during the daytime, and sleep during the night. This means that they are diurnal animals, as opposed to nocturnal animals.

Unlike other members of the rodent family, Degu's do not have an overpowering smell, and any smell that they do have can easily be groomed away. These amazing creatures, again, are extremely intelligent, and can not only be tamed, but can also be trained.

Their sociability and trainability make these animals preferable over hamsters and gerbils for many people. Children love interacting with Degu's, and adults love the company that the Degu provides as well.

The Degu looks like a combination of a squirrel, chinchilla, and a rat. The fur is brown or gray, or a mixture of brown and gray, but the tips of the hair are always black. The underbelly will be a lighter color.

During the winter months, the fur becomes thicker, and during the summer months, it will become thinner. A Degu may have a white spot or two on its fur. This is actually considered a sign of domestication. The Degu has brown eyes and orange teeth. The pet Degu grows to be about 30 cm in length, and this measurement includes the tail. This makes the Degu a perfect pet when space is an issue.

Now that you know what a Degu is, how can you determine whether or not this is the right pet for you? Read on!

Is a Degu the Right Pet for You?

While the Degu is seemingly the perfect pet for anybody, it really may not be the right pet for you. It all comes down to what you expect from a pet, and what that pet will expect from you.

As with any pet, time is an issue. All pets require some level of time and attention, and if you do not have time to spend with your pet, don't get one. This isn't fair to the animal. Degu's require about an hour of your attention each and every day.

Many people mistakenly think that if they get more than one Degu, they don't have to spend as much time with the animal. This is false. The Degu may not suffer as much emotionally from your lack of attention, but it still needs your care, which in turn requires your time and attention.

Degu's are small, and initially, this makes one think that they don't require much space. Again, this isn't necessarily true. Your Degu will require an enclosure that is a suitable size, allowing room for plenty of movement. The Degu doesn't take up much room, but his living quarters might.

Degu's are suitable pets for children, but you must be cautious. Because they are so small, a child's less than gentle handling could harm the Degu. Furthermore, if the Degu is being hurt by the child – no matter how accidental that is – it will behave like any other animal and defend itself, using its teeth and claws.

There is some contradiction as to how long a Degu will live, and this may be a factor for determining whether it is the right pet for you. In the wild, Degu's live up to 13 years. However, captive Degu's often live between five and eight years. Then, however, it is said that Degu's that are well cared for live longer than those who are left in the wild. Either way, you must assume that your Degu will live between five and thirteen years, with the average being eight years.

Degu's become attached to their humans. For this reason, if you don't think that you would keep the animal for very long, don't get one. Our situations often change, and it may be possible that your situation could change to the point where you could no longer keep the pet. Again, if this is the case, don't get one.

While Degu's are small, there is a cost associated with owning one. There is a cost for housing and bedding, food, grooming supplies, and of course veterinarian check-ups, as well as visits to the vet if and when the Degu becomes ill. If you cannot afford these costs, don't get a pet Degu!

Degu Housing

Once you know what a Degu is, why you would want one, and whether or not a Degu is the right pet for you, the next thing that you must concern yourself with is suitable housing for your pet Degu. Unlike many other animals, Degu's have specific housing requirements, which must be met.

Degus like to climb and jump, and as small as they are, this still requires a great deal of room. Many people purchase multi-tiered cages for their Degus housing. The cage should be at least 1.5 to 2 feet in height, with approximately the same width – or close to the same width.

Degus like to gnaw. Therefore, not just any cage will do. The only two safe choices are glass or steel. Do not purchase plastic cages that are designed and advertised as suitable for rodents. These cages will not last very long with a Degu in residence.

Most Degu owners opt for steel bar cages, because the bars can be utilized by the Degu, and because there is better ventilation in these cages, then there is in glass aquariums. The bars should be fairly close together to keep even the smallest of Degu's contained.

For your sanity, and the Degu's comfort, you might want to consider placing a flat piece of glass or metal in the bottom of the cage. You might also consider having some metal formed to go around the bottom edge of the cage. This will make things safer and more comfortable for your Degu, but it will also keep the Degu's mess contained in the cage, and off of your floor.

It is important to realize that there will be more than just your Degu in the cage. There will also be numerous accessories, and the Degu still needs plenty of room to move around. The more they can move, the happier they will be. Furthermore, in most cases, you will want at least two Degus, and the cage needs to be spacious enough for both of them – or all of them should you desire more than two.

It cannot be said enough that the bottom of the cage, as well as the bottom edges of the cage, need to be solid. This is most likely something that you will need to do yourself and it can be accomplished with glass, metal, or pliable tin, which can then be wrapped around the edge. When we get into the accessories used in the cage, you will understand why this is so important to you.

One thing is certain, the cage that you purchase may be too small, but it can never be too big for a Degu. Get as much cage as you can afford, in terms of space and money.

Degu Bedding

Choosing the right bedding for your Degu is very important to the well being of your pet. The bedding needs to be of higher quality. It should not be pine or cedar shavings, because these can cause serious, or fatal, respiratory problems for your Degu.

You should also avoid using sawdust, or any other bedding that consists of small particles. These small particles can become lodged in the Degu's eyes, or ingested, which could be quite dangerous. You will find many experts suggest sawdust as a part of the bedding, but again, if you use saw dust, you are running the risk of jeopardizing the Degu's health.

So, what type of bedding should you select? Aside from pine or cedar, wood shavings or chips are preferred by Degus. They are especially happy when you mix in a little straw or hay with the wood. In fact, you should put quite a bit of hay in the cage. Not only will they enjoy eating it, they will also use it for nesting materials, and separating the hay from the wood will allow the Degu to do the things that he was born to do – forage.

Giving the Degu a little fabric and absorbent paper mixed in with the wood and hay will make him even happier. You don't have to shred or cut the fabric or paper...the Degu will do that himself.

The bedding that you choose needs to be absorbent. The bedding should cover the bottom of the cage, but it doesn't need to be overly thick. An inch to two inches of bedding will do just fine. Since pine and cedar are not options, you might want to search for Aspen wood bedding for your Degu.

Remember that the cage must be cleaned, which means that you will need to get rid of existing bedding fairly often. For this reason, while you want a high quality bedding material, you also need to choose bedding material that you can afford to replace regularly.

Also, before you put the bedding in the cage, lay down some newspaper. This makes the bedding more absorbent, and makes it easy to clean out the cage. You just simply lift the corners of the newspaper; fold it up around the bedding, and dispose of it.

Once you have selected a bedding material, and your Degu has done well with it, avoid changing to a different type or brand. Degu's like order and familiarity, and changing their bedding materials can upset their normal routine.

Degu Cage Necessities

As mentioned earlier, there are several accessories that are needed in the Degu's cage. To you, these may seem like 'extras.' To your Degu, however, they are necessities.

You need to include some branches in the cage. These will be used for gnawing and climbing. Rocks are also preferred, such as lime stone. Branches and stones will need to be replaced when they have been gnawed to their limits. This gnawing that your Degu does is essential, as it prevents his teeth from growing into his jaw.

You must provide a house within a house for your Degu. This is the place where he can hide from the world, and he may want to nest here as well. Nesting boxes can be made or purchased. Igloo houses that are large enough for Degu's are greatly appreciated as well. Again, make sure that you provide fabric and paper for nesting materials.

Bowls, flower pots, and anything that the Degu can climb in will also be appreciated, as long as he will also be able to get back out again. Again, whatever you put in the cage will be gnawed! So, if you don't want it to be destroyed, choose objects made of indestructible (by Degus) material. Avoid anything plastic, as plastic will be destroyed, and possibly ingested, with horrifying results.

PVC pipe pieces are great in Degu cages. Not only can you use these pieces to create a tunnel system, which gives your Degu even more to do, but it also provides hiding places for the Degu. For proper exercise, you need a wheel. Since Degus gnaw everything, the solid plastic wheels won't do. Instead, you need a wire wheel. Make sure that you get a big one!

Your Degu requires sand baths, which he will give himself. This sand can be purchased in your local pet store, and you just need to put it in a container, and place it in the cage. Most people don't leave the sand bath in the cage all of the time. Just put it in for several hours once every two days or so.

Finally, your Degu needs a water bottle and a food dish. Choose a glass water bottle, so that it isn't gnawed to pieces, and choose a crock bowl for food, so that it isn't easily knocked over. You could also choose a manger type food dish, which attaches to the side of the cage. However, it must still be made of material that the Degu cannot destroy.

Aside from these things, you will also provide a variety of toys for your Degu. Degu appropriate toys will be discussed later.

Grooming Your Degu

Grooming a Degu is easier than grooming any other type of pet. Essentially, they do all of the grooming themselves, and all you need to do is to provide the right tools for the job.

For the most part, bathing with water is not required. However, some Degu owners cannot fathom having an indoor pet that never gets a bath, and they may opt to give the Degu a bath once a month or so. Don't overdo water baths, as they are not necessarily good for the Degu.

Your Degu does, however, require sand baths often. Some owners leave the sand bath in the cage. If you opt to do this, realize that sometimes, the Degu will use it as a toilet, and you will need to clean and sift the sand on a daily basis. Other owners put the sand bath into the cage once every day, or every two days, for an hour or so.

The sand bath is incredibly important. It keeps the Degu's skin from becoming oily, and it actually gets the dirt and grim off of them. It is important that you use sand that is designed for Chinchillas, and not just any kind of sand. A sand bath may be referred to as a dust bath as well.

You will most likely want and/or need to clip your Degus nails. Otherwise, you can expect to get scratched (accidentally) a great deal. Those nails can certainly get sharp – and painful. Note that some Degus keep their own nails short, and trimming is not necessary.

Trimming the Degus nails is relatively easy, and is done just like trimming the nails of any other pet. Get pet nail trimmers at your local pet store. Look closely at the nail, and make sure that you are not cutting down into the quick of the nail bed, as this can be very painful. If you are nervous about trimming his nails, you can take him to the veterinarian or to a groomer to have this done.

Again, there isn't much to grooming a Degu. They do all of the grooming themselves, and because Degu's work best in pairs, they will often groom each other. Degu's may also groom you, and this should be construed as a sign of affection.

For Degus, time spent not grooming the animal is typically replaced with time spent cleaning the cage. How often the cage is cleaned depends on how large the cage is, and how many Degus are in it. If you have an average sized cage, with just a couple of Degus in it, you can usually clean the cage once a week.

Feeding Your Degu

As with any other living, breathing thing, food is very important to the Degu. Degus are herbivores. They do not eat meat. Instead, they eat vegetables, including grass and seeds.

To date, there are few commercial pet foods designed specifically for Degus. Many pet stores do not carry Degu food, and sadly, many pet stores don't even realize that Degus are pets. Some don't even know what a Degu is.

When you do find a pet store that sells Degu food, you will find that it costs a great deal more than foods designed specifically for other pets. Many owners find that a mixture of Chinchilla food and Guinea Pig food provides the Degu with the nutrition that it requires. Chinchilla pellets are often used, and rodent blocks can also be provided.

Many Degu owners don't feed their pets a commercial food at all. Instead, they feed their Degus fresh vegetables, which in the long run, are actually healthier for the Degu. Carrots, cucumbers, green peppers, green beans, broccoli, peeled sweet potatoes, leafy greens, and just about any other type of vegetable will be loved by your Degu. Dandelion leaves are also favored.

Aside from a food mix, your Degu requires other things for a well rounded diet. This includes branches, twigs, and hay. Oak tree twigs and small branches are especially loved by Degus. Note, also, that there is a difference between grass and hay, and your Degu wants and needs both.

You can literally walk out into your yard, pick some grass, and feed it to your Degu. However, make sure that you choose grass that has not been soiled by other animals, as well as grass that has not been chemically treated. Furthermore, the grass must be freshly picked when you feed it to your Degu. Hay and grass should always be available for your Degu.

Degus should not be fed any sugary foods. They are prone to diabetes, and sugary foods can quickly become a problem. They should have foods that are high in fiber and low in carbohydrates for the healthiest diet. Fruit is not good for Degu's. The sugar content is too high in fruit, and this includes raisins.

Seeds make great treats for Degu's. Just remember that seeds are fattening, and Degu's can easily become overweight. Therefore, make sure that treats are real treats, meaning that they are given on occasion – not daily. Appropriate seeds are sunflower seeds, shelled peanuts, and whole nuts.

So, daily, your Degu needs about the equivalent of a tablespoon of pellets each day, with constant access to hay, grass, and twigs. He needs about three rodent blocks, unless you are feeding him fresh vegetables, and then he needs about the same amount as the size of the three rodent blocks.

Should your Degu start experiencing any health problems, look for to his diet for the cause. In many cases, a poor health condition is a direct result of a poor or inappropriate diet.

You may want to give your Degu some supplements. Appropriate supplements include calcium and vitamin C. These supplements can be added to the water that the Degu drinks. In most cases, you should consult your veterinarian before giving your Degu supplements.

Finally, your Degu needs fresh water everyday. Make sure that you empty, wash, thoroughly rinse, and refill the water bottle each day. Degu's prefer their water room temperature, and because tap water isn't necessarily pure and free from additives, commercial bottled water is always preferred.

If you have more than one Degu, you probably need more than one water bottle. Furthermore, if you have more than one Degu, you need more than one food dish, as they will argue over food, and those arguments can get pretty serious.

When it comes to feeding your Degu and figuring out how much he needs, and which foods he likes, you have to watch carefully, so that you know how much they are really eating. Degus love to play with their food. The dish may be empty, but this doesn't mean that the Degu ate all of the food. He probably buried some of it...or all of it if he didn't like it.

Then again, he may have loved it and buried most of it to save it for later. The problem here is, however, if you fed him fresh foods, those foods will spoil before he comes back to them...or they will be thrown out when you clean out his cage. If you notice, however, that your Degu is burying his food, this is a good indication that you are feeding him too much. He isn't hungry, but he is an animal, so he is saving it for later, when he might be hungry.

Make sure that you read all labels of all foods that you feed your Degu. Remember that they are prone to diabetes, simply because their little bodies cannot process sugar. If the foods that you are feeding him contain sugars or dextrose, you are contributing to his poor health. Avoid any and all sugary foods!

It may take a little time to figure out exactly what your Degu wants to eat, and how much he needs, but if you watch and pay attention, you will soon figure it out. Also, talk to your veterinarian about the dietary needs of your specific Degu. Just as all people are not created equally, all Degu's are not created equally.

Your Degu's Behavior

Wild Degu's live in large communities. In each of these large communities, there are small 'neighborhoods,' which are called clans. Each clan usually has one male, and between two and four females, with the average being three females. Regardless of how many females there are, however, there is always just one male. The entire community of Degu's may have thousands of members.

These communities of Degus live in underground burrows. There are tons of tunnels that lead to many different 'rooms' and each 'room' has a function, such as a food room, a litter room, and even a bedroom. The outside entrance to each of these burrows is marked with sticks and stones, and the higher the mound is, where the entrance is, the more important that male is in the community. If that mound is destroyed, that male loses his 'importance' in the Degu community.

Now, your Degu doesn't live in the wild, but this is his heritage, and understanding this community and pecking order will take you a long way in understanding your domesticated Degu.

From this information alone, you should realize that Degus are very social animals. They not only want socialization with you, but also with their own kind, meaning that a single Degu will be a very lonely, possibly unhappy Degu. There may be squabbles in the cage, but for the most part, your group of Degus will be quite happy together, in most cases.

In spite of how social the Degus are, however, it is important to put two or more Degus together when they are quite young, instead of trying to put two older Degus in the same cage, when they do not already know each other. Also, remember that in the wild, there is just one male, and several females in a clan. You probably don't want more than one male in your cage.

If you do need to introduce two older Degus to each other, put them in two cages close to each other. This gives them the opportunity to communicate and get to know each other, without the potential for fights where injuries may occur. When Degus fight, it could be a fight to the death. This is especially true in territorial wars.

It's important to know what kind of fighting is actually going on when fights do break out...and fights will break out from time to time. Some fights will require your interference, while others are best left to the Degus to settle. It is important to remember that they have their own hierarchy system.

One thing that you will often see is known as play fighting. They may box each other, chase each other, or even nip each other. During these 'fights' there will often be a great deal of chattering going on as well. Watch for a bit. Degus like to play fair, so one Degu may chase for a while, and then the other one will chase. In this instance, you don't have to do anything but watch and be amused.

Minor fights can break out over items, including food, toys, treats, or anything else that the Degus have in their environment. This should not be happening daily, and if it is, you may have Degus that cannot and will not get along. In this instance, separating them may be the only option. Just as there are some people in this world that you really can't stand, your Degus have those same feelings and opinions. How would you like to be forced to live with that woman from the office that you cannot stand?

However, if these minor fights seem to be happening more frequently, with Degus that know each other and have gotten along well in the past, this could indicate that you need to get a bigger cage, add an additional food dish, and place additional toys in the environment.

Again, Degus have their own hierarchy system, and nothing that you do is going to change that. There will be arguments to determine who the top dog...or top Degu...is in the cage. The only time that this really must be settled among the Degus is when there is no heir apparent. For example, if all of the Degus in the cage are the same age, size, and sex, there is no heir apparent.

Fighting will most likely occur, and you must watch. The fighting may not be very intense, but it could become that way. Serious fighting includes grunting and growling, kicking, tail thumping, and biting. The good news is that once the Degus have settled their dominance dispute, life in the cage will become calm and pleasant once again.

Serious fighting, which is not part of a dominance dispute, usually requires your intervention. Serious fighting closely resembles the fighting that will occur for the establishment of dominance; however, you will know that it is serious fighting if dominance has already been established. Before that time, you can only assume that the Degus are fighting for dominance. After that time, you must assume that there is a serious problem that may or may not be settled, and you may need to separate the Degus.

To break up a fight, you may want to put on a pair of leather gloves. You can throw a towel over the fighting Degus, which will temporarily distract them. Once you throw the towel over them, pick up one of the Degus, and quickly place him in a separate cage. After one fight, you can give the Degus several days apart, but in cages near each other, and then try to put them back together. If a second fight occurs, however, you should separate them permanently.

Otherwise, the Degus will get along beautifully. They will play together, enjoy meals together, snuggle together, chatter to each other, work together, and even groom each other. When all of this is going on, you know that life in the cage is grand.

Even though two or more Degus will happily keep each other company, without interaction from you, they may start to demonstrate poor behavior. Like small

children, they do need your time and attention, and they need time outside of their cage to explore a bit. Just make sure that they are exploring in a safe environment, and that you are keeping your eyes on them the entire time.

Try to hold and pet each of your Degus for ten or fifteen minutes each day. This keeps them used to human interaction, and you will be amazed at how much they actually enjoy it.

Degus are very busy little animals. They are not lazy in any form or fashion. Therefore, when they are awake, they need plenty to do. If they become bored, they may not behave very well. Degus are usually awake all day, and will usually be exploring, playing with each other, or nest building the entire time that they are awake. Remember that Degus like to dig and burrow, and if you provide materials for them, they will keep themselves quite busy with this activity.

Again, it is important that you handle your Degus on a daily basis. If you go several days or longer without handling them, you may find that they become aggressive, and that they seemingly no longer like being handled. It is not known, since no Degu can be asked, if this is just the way that the Degu expresses hurt feelings, or if he has forgotten his tame ways that quickly.

Degus chew – everything. This is not a sign of bad behavior, and it is not an instinct that you are going to be able to stop. Instead, you must make sure that your Degu has plenty to chew on, that he isn't chewing on anything dangerous to him, and that he isn't chewing his way out of his cage. Chewing is very important to the Degus health, and helps to keep his teeth, which are always growing, worn down. Do not try to discourage chewing.

As smart as Degus are, they would never understand discipline. You can't really discipline an animal for being an animal. If they are demonstrating 'bad' behavior, which to them may be perfectly normal behavior, you must look to see what you are or are not doing to cause the bad behavior, or what exists in their environment that is causing the bad behavior. You can't blame the Degu, or punish him for it.

Again, if you understand how Degus behave in the wild, you will have a greater understanding of what is going on inside of the cage. Despite being domesticated, your Degus will carry their heritage and traditions forward, from one generation to the next.

Your Degu's Communication

Degus communicate very well. They communicate with each other, and if you listen closely, they communicate with you as well. Overall, you will hear about

four different, distinct sounds from your Degu. It is important to understand what each of these sounds mean.

Chatters: Chatter is the most basic form of communication. It may sound something like chipmunk chatter, and when you hear this, your Degus are just 'talking' to each other...or possibly to you. Some people liken this sound to 'squeaks.' Chattering may also sound like chirps and chitters. However, note that some experts believe that continued chattering means that the Degu is unhappy with something. Loud squeaks mean that the Degu is very unhappy, scared, or in danger.

Whines: This is an actual whining sound. It is a sound that indicates that the Degu is not happy or satisfied with something. The whines that you hear may be in response to another sound or action that a different Degu made. Sounds included in whines are weeps, grunts, and barks. Whines may be accompanied by chattering and growling.

Warbling: Warbling sounds mean everything is great, and the Degu is happy. This may be their expression of love – for you or other Degus. This sound is commonly made upon greeting. This is a very peaceful, pleasant sound. Warbling may also occur when a male wants to mate with a female.

Time to Eat: The sounds that Degus make when they are given food are indescribable, and something that you have to hear for yourself. There is a wide variety of noise going on in the cage, and it could be verbal squabbles over the food. You have to hear it to understand it.

Pay close attention to your Degus, and the sounds that they make. When you hear a new or different sound, take a look to see what is going on. In a short matter of time, you will know exactly what each sound means, and what is required of you when you hear those sounds. Hearing the sounds, and seeing what is going on when those sounds are made is really the only way that you will learn how to communicate with your Degu.

Degu Health Issues

As with any other pet, Degus do have specific health problems that you must either try to prevent, or be on the lookout for. Failing to understand these health

issues could be a death sentence for your Degu. It's also important to know when to take your Degu to the veterinarian.

Degus cannot process sugar. Therefore, they are at high risk for diabetes. You should not feed your Degu any sugar, or sugary foods, including fruit. The first sign of a diabetic Degu is usually being overweight, or quickly becoming overweight. You will also notice that your Degu drinks more water than usual.

If they Degu becomes obese, and then losses the weight and becomes thin, without you changing their diet, this does not mean that the diabetes has miraculously gone away. It means that the Degu is near the end of his life, dying from diabetes. Diabetes, or signs of diabetes, requires the services of a veterinarian.

Liver disease is a possibility, if the Degus diet consists of too much fat. Signs of this are similar to signs of diabetes, where the Degu becomes overweight and drinks a great deal of water. The way to prevent this is to not feed them too many fatty foods, such as nuts. Nuts should be used as occasional treats. Liver disease requires the services of a veterinarian.

Dry skin, while not serious, is uncomfortable, and should be dealt with. This usually does not require a veterinarian. Dry skin can occur if you are not allowing your Degu to get regular sand or dust baths. If dry skin occurs, you can coat the skin with baby oil, cocoa butter, or Aloe Vera.

Due to either diabetes or a genetic condition, your degu may suffer from cataracts. Most Degus can still manage life quite well with cataracts. You can take your Degu to the veterinarian, to ensure that it is cataracts, and nothing more serious.

Foot problems are common, and usually come from living in a wire floored cage. This is usually called bumble foot. This may also occur if you have a wire wheel, instead of a solid wheel. Unfortunately, wire wheels are necessary for Degus, because they chew the plastic solid wheels up. Replace the flooring of your cage with a solid material, remove the wire wheel, and allow your Degus feet to heal before putting the wheel back into the cage.

Degus often get infections in their mouths. One way to prevent this is to ensure that the water bottle is always clean. Signs of a mouth infection include pawing at the mouth, trouble eating, or weepy eyes. Problems with the teeth are very common, since a Degus teeth grow for their entire lives. This is why chewing is so important, as it keeps the length of the teeth worn down, preventing them from growing into the jaw. This does require the services of a veterinarian.

Stress is a problem that you must deal with. Stress can cause fur chewing and biting. If your Degu is continually making unhappy sounds, and always looking for

a way to escape, he is probably stressed. The only cure for stress is to figure out what is causing the stress, and remove the stressful situation.

Ovarian problems are common in female Degus. Symptoms vary, but may include dry, scaly skin. In most cases, a hysterectomy is needed. Unfortunately, due to their small size, and the location of the female organs in Degus, most veterinarians will not attempt such a surgery. The best that you can do, in most cases, is hope for the best possible outcome.

Some defects and illnesses are caused by genetics, and are a result of inbreeding, which is common in Degu communities. Some defects are actually caused by injuries. Injuries should be immediately cared for, preferably by a licensed veterinarian, no matter how minor you may think that they are. Those injuries could have lasting effects, and could even turn fatal.

Finally, it is important to note that like most animals, Degus will try to hide pain and illness. Furthermore, it is agreed by experts that Degus actually have a high tolerance for pain. This means that an injury or illness may exist, but that your Degu doesn't feel enough pain – or pay enough attention to pain – to acknowledge it. Along with this, however, you must realize that if your Degu is showing signs of pain or illness, the injury or illness is probably pretty serious.

As with anything else, the best cure is always prevention. Work to make sure that you're Degu stays healthy. Make sure that his diet is healthy, that his water bottle is always clean and full, and that his cage is as sanitary as possible. Note how much your Degu is eating and drinking, and if there is a change, take him to the veterinarian.

Provide regular dust baths. Some prefer to make the dust bath available two or three times a week, while other owners feel that daily dust baths are best. Make it a point to hold your Degu each day, and to inspect him for any injuries or abnormalities. Get injuries and abnormalities checked by your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Make it a point to weight your Degu at least once a month, and to keep a record of those weights. Watch for odd behavior as well, and when you see odd behavior, realize that it could be an indication of a health problem.

If you do these things, your Degu will most likely enjoy excellent health. Remember that his good health is your ultimate responsibility.

Degu Breeding Information

If you are considering breeding your Degus, realize first that there is no real money to be made in Degu breeding. If you are doing it for the money, consider something else. If you are doing it for the right reasons, however, read on.

First note that finding homes for baby Degus isn't always easy. This is a relatively new pet. Many people don't have a clue what a Degu is, and cannot provide appropriate homes. Often, the breeder ends up keeping the Degus. Some people breed accidentally, which is known as irresponsible breeding.

The golden rule is that you should check to see how much it costs to have your male Degu neutered. If the cost is high, and you cannot afford it, then you won't be able to afford the veterinarian bills that often accompany breeding as well. The solution here is to keep males and females separate, or to save the money to have the male neutered. Most veterinarians will not spay females.

With that said, Degus can become sexually active when they are just a couple of months old. You will hear a series of mating calls, typically from the male. Males also have a series of sounds that are made after mating has taken place. These sounds could go on as long as an hour. The gestation period of Degus is 90 days, but in most cases, you won't be able to tell that the female is pregnant until she is about 30 days from delivering.

Try not to handle a pregnant female too much. Degus miscarry easily, and handling her while she is pregnant will also cause her undue stress, which can also lead to miscarriage. Do not rub her belly, even though it is irresistible.

You will need to be prepared for the birth. First, you need a good veterinarian, who is capable of performing an emergency c-section, in the event that things go wrong during delivery...which is common. Provide your Degus with plenty of nesting materials. They will usually do the rest.

Baby Degus are born with teeth, fur, and open eyes. They are very fast learners, and within hours of being born, they will be moving about the nest, with their curious instinct in high gear. They will also eat regular food within hours of their birth, although nursing is also important for them. It is vital that the baby's remain with their mother for at least eight weeks.

Do not panic when you see the female Degu lie on top of her babies. She isn't trying to kill them...this is how she nurses them. If the female or the male act aggressively toward the babies, this is a sign of a problem and you may find yourself caring for the babies yourself. If it is just the male being aggressive, however, you can simply remove him from the cage.

It is also important that female babies be removed from the male within a month of their birth. This can be very upsetting for the male, but one solution is to keep the male babies with the male, and the female babies with the female. A litter can consist of one to eight babies, but the average number is five.

It is also important to note that the female can become pregnant again. In fact, she can get pregnant very easily within the first 24 hours of giving birth. Getting pregnant so soon after the birth isn't healthy for the female, the current litter, or the resulting litter.

Therefore, it is wise to separate the male and female for a few days following the birth. However, you then need to return the male to his family. In the Degu community, the males and females both tend to their young. Other than moving the Degus, it is important not to handle the babies too often, before they are at least a week old. After that, daily handling is suggested, as this is part of the human/Degu socialization process.

Ideally, the pair that you plan to breed should be introduced to each other when they are quite young. Allow them to build a relationship, so to speak. It is vital, however, that you not allow related Degus to mate, as this often results in genetic disorders and deformities.

Make sure that your cage is suitable for babies. Note the distance between wires, and determine whether a solid enclosure is better for the time being. Also, it is a good idea to remove the exercise wheel. When the female runs on the wheel, the babies may try to join her, resulting in injuries.

It is wise to have the litter, and the mother, examined by a veterinarian about a week or two after they are born. The people who buy your baby Degus will want to know that they are healthy, and those that do have health or genetic problems may need special love and care, which means that not just any potential degu owner will do.

Baby Degus are adorable, but this isn't a good reason to breed them. Again, this is a great deal of responsibility. There is a cost involved, and often, the amount that you earn from selling the babies will not cover the costs of breeding.

Accidental breeding should be avoided by keeping males separate from females, or by having males neutered. Also note that males can still get females pregnant for up to six weeks after being neutered, because they store sperm.

Also, make sure that you have your male and female examined by a veterinarian before mating takes place, to ensure that a resulting litter has a healthy, fighting chance.

Degu Safety

Degu safety is important. These little creatures are very curious, and that curiosity can lead to accidents and injuries. Furthermore, because Degus are so little, injury can occur even through no fault of their own.

Chewing is a huge factor in Degu safety. Remember that chewing is important, and it is vital that you provide 'chewables.' However, you must make sure that you are not giving the Degu anything to chew that could be lethal or toxic to him. Certain types of woods are toxic to Degus.

In fact, the list of toxic woods is incredibly long, so it is easier to state which woods are safe. Safe woods include hazelnut, hawthorn, and apple. Kiln dried pine is also safe. All woods provided must not be treated with any pesticides.

Chewing also prevents a problem in that small pieces can be ingested, can become lodged in the throat, or may not be digested properly, and could also lodge in the stomach or intestines. The Degus are going to chew everything. Make sure that everything that they have access to is safe, from a toxic point of view, as well as from a digestive point of view.

Although you've provided your Degu a comfortable home, their chewing habit, coupled with their curiosity is a safety issue. If they can chew a hole in their enclosure, they will escape, no matter how much they enjoy their home. They won't be able to contain their curiosity, and they are not aware of the dangers. Make sure your Degu's home is not only comfortable, but also safe from escape.

Other pets are a danger. This doesn't mean that you cannot have other pets. It simply means that the Degus must be kept safe from the other pets...especially cats. Cats don't view Degus as loved pets. They view Degus as prey. Because Degus are as fearless as they are curious, they most likely will not run and hide from the cat.

When you allow your pet Degu out of his cage for some good old fashioned run time, you must keep a constant eye on him. Not only are there dangers throughout your home for him, but there is also the danger of him getting lost...or you losing him, and him not reappearing for a timely return to his cage. He may know exactly where he is, and be perfectly content to stay there...right where you can't find him.

If you lose your Degu, use caution. Do not start tossing things around or moving things too much to find him. Think like your Degu. What small spaces are there that he might have burrowed into? What items are about that he may be using for a tunnel? Also realize that Degus don't have a great deal of sense when it comes to space. They can get stuck.

The good news is that, again, your Degu probably isn't lost at all...you just cannot find him. When he gets hungry or thirsty, and there is no other food or water

source available, he will return to the place where he knows food and water exists...his cage.

Another way to get a Degu to come out from his hiding place is with sound. If you always make a certain sound when you supply food, he will always come running to the food bowl when he hears that sound - unless something is preventing him from doing so. This could be a whistle or a bell. It takes the Degu about three weeks to relate the sound with the food.

If you want to give your Degu some run room, try putting him in a playpen designed for a baby. Note, however, that he can chew through, and he can climb out of the playpen, so the best advice is to keep a constant eye on him, and return him to his nice, safe cage when you cannot watch him.

Provide a safe environment. Obviously, you will do all that you can to ensure that your Degus cage is safe. However, when you let him out of that cage, there are all kinds of dangers that you and him may not be aware of. Cleaning supplies should be stored where the Degu cannot get to them. Furthermore, if you use harsh chemicals on your floors, this could be a danger to a Degu roaming those floors.

It isn't easy, but you should always try to see the environment from the Degus point of view. Look around at what he could get into. Think about what he will be curious about. Think about his burrowing and tunneling tendencies and the types of materials that he likes to use for these activities. Determine in advance what he will want to chew. Remove those dangers from his path.

Give your Degu lots of attention and care, and you will enjoy him for many years to come. These are interesting, curious little creatures and a great deal of fun. The Degu really is a pet, and now that you know exactly what they are, and what you can expect from them, you are ready to become a Degu owner.



Caring for Your Pet Naturally

More and more dog and cat owners are turning to natural pet care to treat various health conditions as well as promote general well-being in their dogs and cats.

New research shows that high quality natural remedies can be safer and oftentimes more effective solution to many common pet ailments. They can not only prevent and treat dog health problems, but also boost immunity and contribute to a long, healthy life for your pet.

As with many of the prescription medications we take, chemical-based drugs for pets can cause very serious side effects as well as weaken immunity which could lead to more health problems down the road. One prime example of this is the recent recall of one of the most popular heartworm medications, ProHeart 6, by the FDA due to over 5000 reports of uncontrolled bleeding, liver problems, seizures and even deaths in dogs who were taking the medication.

If you would like to learn more about safe, effective [natural pet care supplements](#) for treating a wide variety of health conditions and improve your pet's health just follow the link, or find more information below.

How are natural pet supplements different than conventional pet medications?

The major difference is that most of them do not cause the serious adverse reactions of prescription medications. Side effects from pharmaceutical drugs are a leading cause of illness and death in humans...it only follows that this is the case with medications for pets.

Natural pet care can offer a safe treatment option, but can also get to the root of the problem and prevent reoccurrence, unlike conventional meds that only treat the symptoms of the disorder and nothing else.

Many pets are allergic to popular medications for heartworm, distemper, kennel cough and others. Still other dogs and cats do not respond well to these convention treatments.

All natural pet remedies and natural pet cures can be quite effective in treating many dog and cat health conditions with vitamins, minerals, herbal extracts and other nutrients that offer health benefits.

If you are interested in natural pet supplements for your dog or cat, take a look at PetAlive.com, offering herbal and homeopathic treatments for many common health conditions as well as boosting immunity and general health of your pet.