

Sexing Your Small Pet

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Correctly sexing small pets is more important than you know. If small pets are incorrectly sexed, you could end up with a surprise pregnancy. While this may sound somewhat fun, the truth is that you would then need to determine what to do with all of the offspring, and you would probably need to set up multiple cages to prevent this from happening again. Therefore, the easiest solution is to verify that you actually have two males or two females. But how can you sex your small pet?

Rabbits

To sex your rabbit, hold it on your lap with the hind legs facing away from you (or towards you if it is a large rabbit). Apply gentle pressure around the anus and genitals. The anus will be close to the tail, and the genital opening is further away from the tail.

Males The penis will look like a tubular protrusion with a small round opening at the tip. If the rabbit is older than 10 weeks and is not neutered, you should be able to see the testicles on either side of the penis.

Females Females also have a pink protrusion, but the tip has a slanted slit shaped somewhat like an oval rather than a circle.

Guinea Pigs

Because they are born almost completely developed, guinea pigs can be sexed shortly after birth. However, we recommend re-checking at about two weeks to make sure that they were correctly sexed.

Males Males have nipples, but they are smaller than the female's. When they are sexually mature, the scrotum is obvious. To see the penis, press gently on the guinea pig's belly near his opening, and the penis will come out.

Females Females have a Y-shaped opening that can be seen by gently parting the opening. It is usually closed by a membrane unless the female is in heat.

Hamsters

It is easiest and most accurate to sex a hamster once it has reached four weeks of age. To sex the hamster, turn it over on its back.

Males Once they are sexually mature at four weeks, male hamsters have a very obvious scrotum. The distance between the anus and the genital opening is about 1/2".

Females Only female hamsters have nipples. The distance between the anus and the urinary/genital opening is so short as to be barely noticeable.

Gerbils

Gerbils can be sexed between 7 and 10 days of age by looking for the presence of nipples (only the females have them), but it's more reliable to sex them at approximately 5 to 6 weeks. If you hold your gerbil by the tail to sex it, be sure to grasp it very gently at the very base of the tail to avoid injuring it.

Males Once they reach sexual maturity, male gerbils have very obvious testicles that look like a bulge at the base of the tail.

Females Females have a very short distance between the anus and the urinary/genital opening. They also have nipples.

Rats

Rats and mice can be sexed as young as 9 days old, and by the time they reach 5 weeks, the difference is very obvious.

Males When the mouse or rat is sexually mature at 5 weeks, the testicles will be very obvious. The space between the anus and the penile opening is wider than in the female.

Females Only the female rat or mouse has nipples - 12 in all, 6 on each side. Females also have a much shorter distance between the anal and urinary/genital openings.

Chinchillas

Chinchillas can be sexed at birth, but it should be checked weekly to make sure that the sexing was done correctly until the chinchilla is approximately 6 to 8 weeks old. To sex your chinchilla, hold it with its front feet on a firm surface (your arm, your leg, a table), firmly grip the base of the tail, and lift gently to expose the genitals.

Males Males have a larger distance between the anus and the penis, and there is a patch of skin between the two.

Females Females have urinary/genital openings that are closer to the anus. Beneath the anus is the vaginal opening, and directly beneath that is the urethral cone.

Hedgehogs

Hedgehogs have obvious differences between the two sexes that are very apparent when you look at the hedgehog's belly. If your hedgehog curls up when you try to check, put it on a glass surface, such as in a baking dish or on a tabletop, so you can look from the bottom. They can be sexed as early as two weeks old.

Males The anus is directly in front of the tail, and the penile opening looks like a belly button located near the center of the hedgehog's belly.

Females The anus and vaginal openings are very close together directly in front of the tail. Females also have nipples.

Sugar Gliders

Sugar gliders are easiest to sex once they have reached sexual maturity. To sex them, turn them over on their backs and look closely at their lower abdomen.

Males Males have a furry scrotum a short distance in front of the tail and the anal opening. They also have a scent gland on the top of their head that results in a diamond-shaped bald patch.

Females Females have a pouch where their young finish developing. This pouch is visible as a 1/2" slit on their belly in approximately the same place the testicles are located on the male.