



Sydney Exotics & Rabbit Vets

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## CARE OF AXOLOTLS

### Vital Statistics

Life expectancy	12 – 15years	Adult body size	20 - 35cm
Sexual maturity	12 – 18months	Life cycle	Totally aquatic

Axolotls *Ambystoma mexicanum* are fully aquatic amphibians belonging to the mole salamander family. Native to Mexico, they have been kept in captivity since the late 1800s. Axolotls are relatively easy to keep, however they have specific requirements that must be met to ensure a healthy life. Below are the basic requirements for keeping axolotls in captivity.

### Enclosures

- Axolotls can be adequately housed in **indoor aquarium set-ups**. Their aquatic nature requires the provision of water so that they can totally submerge. They can survive for only very short periods out of water
- For most adults a standard 0.6 – 1.2m long tank can be used. Fill the tank ½ to ¾ with water. A lid is sometimes required to ensure that they can't 'jump' out of the tank
- **Substrates** (layer of material on bottom of tank): large pebbles or sand can be used. Ensure the pebbles are big enough so that the axolotls can't eat them (ie greater than 2cm wide). Having no substrate generally means it's easier to maintain water quality and keep the tank clean. However simple glass floors may cause stress - by being too bright and/or too slippery
- Furnishings can include plastic plants and pipes to hide in and amongst. Live plants usually won't survive in the low light conditions of an axolotl aquarium

### Lighting

- Axolotls have no eyelids and **prefer low light levels**. Dim lighting can be provided by a low wattage light source (but not so low as to prevent sight of them)
- Ensure that the light source does not emit too much heat. Axolotls **prefer cooler water** temperatures. Avoid placing tanks in areas that receive direct sunlight
- Provide them with places to 'hide' away from the light

### Water Quality

- Water temperatures should be maintained at **15-20C**. Temperatures above 24C could endanger their lives
- Monitor water temperatures with protected submersible **aquarium thermometers**
- Good water quality is vital for an axolotl's health. There are many factors that we can influence and affect, namely water pH, water hardness and water cleanliness (often concerning water nitrogen compound levels)
- The water must be continuously **filtered**. Ideally use a '**biological**' **water filter** system. This helps to remove toxic nitrogen compounds. Axolotls do not like strong currents, so disperse the water outlet flow over a wide area
- Regardless of the filter's efficiency, **weekly 25% water changes** are still recommended
- **Water pH** refers to how acidic or alkaline the water is. Ideally axolotl tank water should be kept at a **pH of 7 to 8** which is considered neutral to slightly alkaline
- The **water hardness** refers to the measure of dissolved 'salts' present in the water. Adding aquarium conditioning salts can be useful in maintaining adequate water hardness. Use the recommended concentration of about 5g aquarium salt per 10L of water
- Use a '**water conditioner**' if topping up with tap water. Good water conditioners will remove potentially harmful chlorine, chloramines and heavy metals from the water

### Feeding Axolotls

- In the wild axolotls are mostly carnivorous & will often eat insects, worms, fish, other amphibians, crustaceans & molluscs
- In captivity, offer them **worms** (tiger, blood, earth, etc), **insects** (cockroaches, crickets, etc) and **small whole fish**
- **Feeding rates**: Feed adults every 2-3 days a few small, bite-sized pieces
- Avoid overfeeding - uneaten food can quickly spoil and adversely affect water quality

### Veterinary & Health Notes

- Have any new axolotl examined by a vet. **Parasite** checks and general blood screens can be performed
- It is essential that you **quarantine** any newly introduced axolotl. Don't risk introducing disease or parasites. Speak to your vet for details on sound quarantine procedures
- It is recommended that you have your axolotl **vet-checked annually**....especially if you intend to breed them
- **Always wash your hands before and after handling** any amphibian & between handling of different animals
- Axolotls can be transported in sealed, water tight (provide air holes) flat bottom containers. Ensure no overheating
- It's a good idea to bring in a sample of the tank water at the vet check. Use a separate clean jar or obtain a specimen container from the vet beforehand