



# Axolotl Care Sheet

## Caring for Axolotls

Axolotls (*Ambystoma mexicanum*) are fascinating amphibians known for their unique appearance and remarkable regenerative abilities. These exotic creatures are only found in the wild in a single lake system in Mexico and are classified as an endangered species. Fortunately, they have gained popularity as pets, with a captive population far exceeding their wild numbers.

With proper care, axolotls can live for 10–12 years (and some reports suggest they may even exceed 20 years!) and grow up to 30 cm in length. Male axolotls can be identified by a noticeable bulge around their vent, while females lack these features.

## Unique Traits of Axolotls

Axolotls are unusual amphibians that never transition into a terrestrial (land-based) form. Unlike frogs, which mature from tadpoles into adult frogs, axolotls remain in their aquatic 'larval' form for their entire lives—a phenomenon called neoteny.

One of their most extraordinary abilities is their capacity to regenerate lost body parts fully. This trait is especially pronounced in younger, healthy axolotls.

## Diet and Feeding

Axolotls are carnivorous predators that rely on their owners to prepare food in captivity, as they cannot chew. They thrive on a varied diet that mimics their natural prey.

### Feeding Guidelines:

- Adults: Feed 'several mouthfuls' every second day.
- Juveniles: Feed once or twice daily.

### Suitable Foods Include:

- Bloodworms
- Daphnia
- Portions of earthworms
- Brine shrimp
- Bite-sized chunks of fish
- Small feeder fish
- Commercial axolotl pellets (as a small to moderate part of their diet)





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**Tip:** Axolotls are adapted to eat moving prey and may need training to recognize still food. Wiggling the food can help.

## Tank Requirements and Husbandry

Axolotls have specific needs to thrive in captivity.

### Tank Setup:

- **Water temperature:** 17–18°C is ideal; tolerates 14–22°C.
- **pH levels:** Neutral (7.0–7.5).
- **Tank size:** Minimum of 38L (10 gallons) for juveniles and 78L (20 gallons) for adults. Larger tanks improve water quality.
- **Water depth:** Should be at least as deep as the axolotl's length.

### Substrate:

- Avoid gravel small enough to swallow.
- Use large rocks (larger than the axolotl's head) or bare tank bottoms. A small amount of 1–2 mm fine gravel can serve as gastroliths to aid digestion and help control buoyancy.

### Lighting and Placement:

- Keep lighting minimal unless live plants are in the aquarium. Provide hiding spots if intense lighting is required.
- Place tanks in low-traffic areas to reduce stress.



### Filtration and Water Flow:

- Use filters suitable for the tank size but avoid strong currents, as axolotls prefer slow-moving or stagnant water.
- Spray bars or tank decorations can help diffuse water flow.

### Important Notes:

- Cycle aquariums for several weeks before introducing axolotls to establish beneficial bacteria.
- Avoid housing axolotls with other aquatic species—they may eat smaller fish, and larger fish can harm their delicate gills.



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## Life Cycle

Axolotls are oviparous (egg-laying) and reach sexual maturity at 10–18 months, but they won't reach full adult size until 2–3 years. Breeding is triggered by a temperature drop and ample food supply.

A single female can lay up to 1,500 eggs, which hatch in 2–3 weeks. Be aware that adults may eat the eggs if not separated.

## Common Health Issues

Axolotls are hardy but can experience health problems if their environment or diet isn't ideal. Regular health check-ups (every 6–12 months) can help prevent these issues.

### Common Health Problems Include:

- Metabolic bone disease
- Bloating
- Infections (bacterial, parasitic, or fungal)
- Foreign body ingestion
- Hyperthermia
- Obesity
- Neoplasia
- Trauma
- Water-borne parasites
- Poor water quality



## When to Seek Veterinary Help

If you notice any unusual behaviour or signs of illness in your axolotl, don't hesitate to contact us. Regular check-ups (every 6–12 months) are the best way to ensure your axolotl stays healthy and happy.

For more information or advice, feel free to reach out to your [local UPV clinic](#).