

Caring for Rats

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Rat Facts

- Domestic rats and humans have been companions for over a hundred years!
- The average rat ranges from 14 to 18 inches long, including the seven-inch tail.
- If well cared for, rats typically live 2-3 years.
- Rats are very social with people and other rats. To keep them mentally stimulated and physically fit they should be allowed out of the cage for play time at least 1-2 hours daily.
- Rats are highly social animals and do best when housed in pairs or groups.

Housing

Rats do best in open-air wire cages that allow good ventilation and opportunity for climbing. A cage that is a minimum of 2 ft x 2 ft x 2 ft will provide adequate space for a pair, but bigger is better. A large, multi-level cage designed for ferrets makes a great rat home provided the bars are spaced close enough to prevent escaping. The floor should be solid, with two to three inch layer of pelleted recycled paper bedding. Pine or cedar bedding can be harmful to rats and should be avoided.

Everyday droppings, uneaten food, and soiled bedding should be removed. Once a week the cage and accessories should be cleaned with warm soapy water and the bedding completely replaced. A clean cage is the first step to a healthy rat.

Rats enjoy a room kept at 60 to 80 degrees (Fahrenheit). Direct sunlight and drafty spaces should be avoided to prevent heatstroke and sudden temperature changes. Place the cage in a location where people gather because, rats think, the more the merrier!

Accessorize! Rats are curious critters, keep them entertained by providing places to climb, hide, and explore. A small box, flowerpots, socks, hammocks, PVC tubes, ropes for climbing, and bird toys are all great fun. Give your rats plenty of choice where they sleep, and dust-free nesting materials to make naptime enjoyable.

Diet

Your rat's main diet should consist of unlimited rat blocks or "fortified diet", a high-quality pellet food formulated for rodents. Rats are

omnivores; fruits and vegetables can be a great addition to their diet. When introducing a new food, only offer a small amount at first. Some rats will not try a new food for several days, while other rats will take only a small bite and then wait to see if they feel ill. Be patient! Peas, broccoli, carrots, apples and bananas are good foods to start with, but check with your vet for which foods would best fit into your rat's diet. Do not give your rat processed people food, especially candy, caffeinated and carbonated beverages, and sticky foods (such as taffy and peanut butter) as they can not digest them properly and could become very ill.

Fresh, clean water should be available at all times. A water bottle with a drinking tube that attaches to the side of the cage is the best way to go.

Starting out on the right paw!

The first 30 days are often the most challenging as you and your new rat get to know each other. Some rats acclimate quickly to new surroundings, while others may need a few days of alone time to get settled in. Remember to be a kind, gentle, loving and reassuring giant to your new friend.

- Knock before entering. To avoid startling your rats let them know you are coming by speaking softly and soothingly to wake them up gently. No one likes to wake abruptly from naptime!
- Place your hand in the cage palm up, encouraging the rats to approach and sniff you. You can give treats and pets before picking them up to build trust.
- Once out of the cage, try to keep noise and movement to a minimum to avoid any scary moments.
- Allow the rat to explore you! Sit still and let the rat travel up your arms, play in your hair, and crawl all over at his pace.
- Take him with you. Rats are pocket-sized love, let your new friend hang out in your sweatshirt while you watch TV or surf the Internet. Snuggling will bring you closer.
- Gaining trust can be a slow process; your time and patience will be rewarded.

For additional guidance, please call us at 408-370-2732.

Helpful Links:

<http://www.hssv.org/behavior.html>

<http://thesocialrat.com/>