



Owning and Caring For Pet Rats

If you are looking for a cuddly, intelligent, and reasonably easy to care for companion, look no farther. Rats make excellent pets in well socialized, clean, stimulating environments, making them ideal for young families. They are easy to train and don't require a lot of space.

Facts:

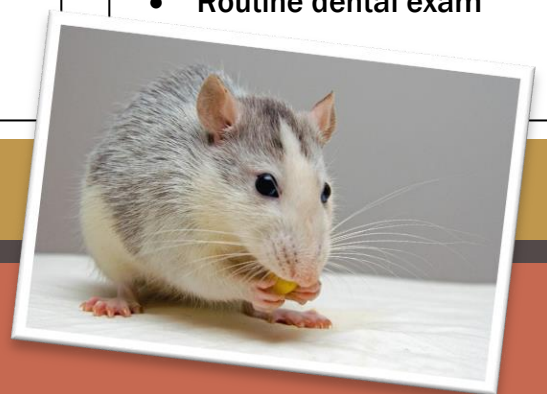
- Lifespan 2-3 years
- Weight about 350-650g
- Rats can't burp, vomit, or sweat
- They are omnivores
- Gestation (pregnancy) about 21 days
- Average litter size 6-10
- Porphyrim is a red tinged liquid that rats secrete from their nose when ill

Common Problems:

- Respiratory infections
- Dental disease
- Head tilt
- Obesity
- Kidney disease
- Salivary gland inflammation
- Parasites
- Mammary tumors

Preventative Care:

- Complete physical exam every 6-12 months
- Yearly fecal exam to check for parasites
- Spay/Neuter at 3-6 months of age
- Annual blood work to monitor organ function
- Routine dental exam



DIET ESSENTIALS

Similar to people, rats are omnivores, however, they choose to primarily feed at night. Also similarly to people, they will preferentially consume more junk food than is good for them if given the opportunity. Your pet rat should be fed a high-quality, commercially processed rat food block/chow, with a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables provided in moderation. However, if the food is made up of a mix, you will have to make sure that the rats are eating everything and not just their favorite pieces, otherwise they aren't getting a nutritionally complete diet. On average, adult rats need 15-20g of food every day. Rats can have a sensitive GI tract, so diet changes and introduction of new foods should be done gradually. Rats should always have fresh water available. The easiest way to provide it is in a gravity bottle, which can be attached to a cage. You should change the water every day and clean the bottle with mild soap once a week.



Say NO to...

- Carbonated/alcoholic beverages
- Blue cheese
- Licorice
- Beans
- Poppy/apple seeds
- Almonds
- Rhubarb
- Avocado skin and pit
- Large amounts of chocolate
- Citrus fruits in male rats
- Peanut butter and other sticky foods can cause a choking hazard
- Potatoes
- Dry corn
- Insects
- Green bananas



Your rats would prefer if you gave them water in a bowl to drink from on occasion, also. This is because they will happily wash themselves in the same water. As a treat for your rats you might like to do this from time to time, especially in hot weather.

Environment

Your basic enclosure for your rat(s) will probably be either a multi-level cage or an aquarium tank. Keep in mind, glass tanks don't have good ventilation, and ammonia build-up from your rat's urine will make a glass tank a very unhealthy place in just a few days. Wire cages with solid floors are best. Be sure your lid secures tightly, as rats are excellent climbers. That, paired with their intelligence makes them skilled escape artists. It is important to AVOID any bedding made from cedar shavings, spruce shavings, birch shavings, and pine shavings. Instead, choose paper-based cat litters, shredded paper, paper towel, or aspen shavings. Rats enjoy having privacy from time to time and require a "hide box" in order to feel secure. The appropriate temperature for your rat's enclosure is 65-75°F with a humidity of 30-70%.

Behavior

Rats demonstrate more personality when housed with other rats. Keeping at least two rats of the same gender (unless they are spayed/neutered) is strongly recommended, otherwise your rat may become lonely and develop behavioral problems. This is safe in most circumstances as fighting rarely occurs among adults, however, it does help if they are approximately the same age and if they are spayed/neutered. Rats are most active at night, making them extremely suitable for people who work all day. They are very gentle creatures and seldom bite unless in pain or very fearful. It is a good idea to wash hands after touching carnivores or food to reduce the chances of being bitten accidentally.

Exercise

Environmental enrichment is extremely important for these intellectual creatures. Rats enjoy tearing up paper or cardboard for nesting material, and they will burrow if given the opportunity. An exercise wheel should be provided with a solid running surface. They also have the

need to explore. Within the cage, give them boxes and tubes to crawl in and parrot-ladders to climb. In fact, the parrot section of your local pet-store probably has a wide assortment of fun toys and puzzles safe for your rats. Ferret toys are also good. As a rodent, your rats have incisor teeth that grow continuously. These little guys need to have something to chew on, to wear the teeth down. Chew-toys designed for parrots are good for this. So are those "Milk-bone" type of dog-biscuits which are designed to clean the dog's teeth. Some rats like dog chewies such as the ones made from pig-ears and beef bones.

Training

It is possible to litter train your pet rats, which is a great idea for those that will be wandering free in the house sometimes. You may also consider building little obstacle courses, and even clicker-training your rat to perform simple tricks, like riding a miniature skateboard. Keep sessions short, as in ten minutes or shorter. The rats will have more fun that way, and they'll learn more.

Grooming

As long as your rat is happy, healthy, and lives in a clean environment, he will do a very thorough job of keeping himself clean. Obviously, if his bedding is encrusted with week-old uneaten treats and feces, he's not going to be able to keep up on his personal hygiene. If he becomes ill, he may need some assistance. If this happens, you may add a few drops of baby shampoo/pet shampoo for kittens to a shallow basin of WARM (not hot) water. Try sponge-bathing him with a washcloth dampened in the soapy water first. If that isn't enough, you'll have to carefully bathe him. Keep his head out of the water and be prepared for him to panic potentially. Dry him carefully, and offer him some treats.