

Introduction to Pet Rats

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Rats are very intelligent, tame animals. They rarely bite and therefore make wonderful pets. Rats are social animals and like to play so they may be housed together. Be careful not to house males and females together unless you are planning to breed them!

Caging

Rats are very agile and can escape many enclosures. Purchase an aquarium or a cage specifically made for larger rodents. It should be big enough to accommodate a rat sized exercise wheel. An enclosure with solid flooring is easier to clean than one made of a wire mesh material. The enclosure should have adequate ventilation. It is very important to be sure the top of the enclosure is secure. Rats are escape artists!

Recycled newspaper, shredded paper or a commercially available nonabsorbent material should be used for bedding. Eco-Bedding brand (looks like crinkled brown paper) is an excellent choice. The bedding should be changed at least twice weekly. Cedar shavings should NOT be used as they can cause allergies resulting in respiratory distress. Place tissue paper and cardboard rolls in the enclosure. Your rat will enjoy shredding them in order to build a cozy nest. Tissue paper should be perfume free and contain no dyes. Empty oatmeal canisters can also be fun for chewing on or for nest building.

Rats need plenty of toys available to keep them entertained. Have a stock of toys on hand and rotate them every few days to help prevent boredom. Be sure to clean your rats' toys regularly.

Diet

Rats should be offered rodent pellets several times throughout the day. We recommend "Regal Rat" by Oxbow Hay. This can be purchased online at www.oxbowhay.com or at our clinic. Other rodent foods/chows are available at pet supply stores. Choose thick ceramic bowls for food to avoid spilling. Fresh water should be available at all times in a thick ceramic bowl or sipper bottle. If you use a bottle, be sure to check it daily for blockage.

Rats on a high quality pelleted diet such as Regal Rat do not need treats. However, some rats may enjoy eating vegetables occasionally. Offer only small amounts. The bulk of your pet's diet should be the nutritionally complete pelleted food. Rats can be cautious eaters and may avoid strange foods, including treats.

Neutering and Spaying

It is important to neuter male rats even if they are not housed with females. Neutering will help prevent aggression and urine marking behaviors from developing after puberty. It will also prevent testicular tumors to which older intact males are prone. It is best to neuter your rat before he reaches sexual

maturity at the age of 4 to 5 weeks. Spaying females will also reduce the chances of uterine and mammary cancers. Female rats can be spayed once they reach 180 grams in weight.

Medical Care

We recommend a yearly examination for your pet rat as signs of disease can be subtle. Having a yearly exam will often identify any problems before they become advanced. It is important to become familiar with your rat so that you know what is normal for him or her. If you notice any changes in physical appearance or behavior, please call us.

Unfortunately, rats are prone to developing tumors as they get older. These tumors can grow very quickly. Bring your rat in for an exam as soon as you notice any abnormal lumps or bumps. Smaller tumors are easier to remove. Rats are also susceptible to respiratory infections. If your pet begins to sneeze or if she has a runny nose or eyes, please call us. Other common issues with rats are hair loss, itchy skin, diarrhea and breathing difficulties. Should any of these signs occur, please call us to schedule an appointment. Because rats are so small, you should not wait if they are ill. Having them seen within 24 hours of noticed clinical signs is recommended.