

Rat General Care and Husbandry

Diet

- Rats require a diet that is properly balanced in vitamins and minerals. There are many commercial rat foods available that are properly balanced to meet your rat's dietary needs.
- Be sure that if you are feeding your rat(s) a pre-mixed food, they are eating all the components. Some rats may pick out only what they want and leave the rest which can also lead to an improperly balanced diet.
- Some good options for treats include:
 1. Fruits: apples (no seeds as they are toxic), grapes, bananas, berries, melons
 2. Veggies: broccoli, peas, carrots, cooked sweet potatoes, parsley, squash, kale
 3. Nuts/seeds
 4. Hard-boiled eggs
 5. Bread
 6. Unsweetened breakfast cereals
- **AVOID** the following: cabbage, Brussels sprouts, raw beans, raw sweet potatoes, chocolate, caffeinated and/or carbonated beverages.
- Always be sure to introduce new foods slowly to avoid diarrhea and other digestive upsets.
- Providing a salt lick for your rat is recommended to prevent the development of mineral and/or vitamin deficiency. Salt licks can be purchased at many pet supply stores.



Housing/Equipment

- Wire cages with solid bottoms are best as they ensure proper ventilation and minimize potential foot injuries. **AVOID** plastic housing as your rat may try to chew through it.
- Rats are very active and love to exercise! We recommend multi-level cages that allow rats to indulge in their natural love of climbing. Exercise wheels are also great options for active rats. However, be cautious of wire ramps or wheels, as rats can injure themselves if their feet or tail get stuck in the wire. If needed, cover the ramps with cardboard or paper towel strips which can be easily removed if they become soiled.
- Always provide fresh food and water for your rat. Water bottles meant specifically for small exotic pets and sturdy, ceramic food bowls are highly recommended, both to prevent spilling and damage from chewing.
- Some recommended choices for bedding include: Care Fresh brand bedding and Aspen shavings. **DO NOT use pine or cedar shavings** as the aromatic oils (what

makes them smell nice) emit irritating fumes that can lead to respiratory issues or allergies.

- Rats love to make nests so providing a nesting/hiding enclosure is important. Cardboard boxes work well, but there are also many options available at pet supply stores. Some good nesting materials include: shredded paper (no ink), paper towels, and tissues.
- Rats also love hammocks and hanging beds!

Handling/Socialization and Enrichment

- Rats are highly social, intelligent animals who enjoy being pet and handled by their humans regularly. They can also be taught various tricks and to navigate mazes.
- Rats form strong social bonds with each other so same sex littermates can be a great option if you want more than one, and so they always have company!
- Rats are very playful and providing toys for enrichment is highly recommended. Some good options include: cardboard boxes, paper towel and toilet paper rolls, bells, and paper towels left in sheets so that they can have the fun of chewing them up!
- Rats also enjoy outside cage time. However, it is important to “rat proof” the room before letting them out. Rats can easily escape through small spaces and they love to chew on things (including electrical wires). Always supervise your rat during this time.
- Rats are chewers and their teeth continuously grow throughout their lifetime. It is very important to provide something for rats to chew on to keep their teeth healthy. Untreated wood chew sticks such as apple and willow are good options.



Health

- Although rats do not require routine vaccines, as with any pet it is important to take your rat to the vet for regular check ups.
- As a rat's teeth will grow continuously throughout their lifetime, dental issues such as malocclusions (misalignment of the teeth or jaw) can be problematic. Providing items for your rat to chew can help prevent these from occurring.
- It is also important to trim your rat's nails if they are not being properly worn down by digging.

References:

<http://exoticpets.about.com>

<http://ratguide.com/health>