

**ANIMAL TALK**  
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## Rat

*Rattus norvegicus domesticus*

### Necessities:

- Cage
- Bedding
- Food dish
- Water bottle
- Mineral lick

- Chew sticks
- Wheel
- Place to hide/sleep
- Rat food

### Extras:

- 10" ball
- Toys
- Treats

### General:

Rats make one of the best pets. Their naturally curious, intelligent and sociable nature make them perfect for both young and old. They love to learn tricks and can learn to come when called. Their average life span is 2-3 years. They can become pregnant as early as 8-10 weeks of age, have a gestation period of approximately 21 days, an average litter size of 10 and can become pregnant again as soon as they finish giving birth. We have even seen situations where they have actually stored sperm and had 1-2 subsequent litters without an available male. Two or more can be kept together although if they have not been raised together there could be disagreements at first. They should be introduced to each other over a 2-3 week period.

### Handling/Exercise:

Rats love attention and should get, on average, about an hour a day of one-on-one attention. This does not have to be all at once but spread throughout the day, especially at dusk when they are the most active. When you first bring your rat home, remember that it will need to learn to trust you and that you are not going to hurt it so take things slowly and quietly. A whole bunch of kids excited about a new pet can be a very scary thing to a little rat.

Toys should be plentiful. A bored rat is a very destructive, unhappy rat. They are so curious and playful that a rat without toys really can become depressed and neurotic. Bird, cat and dog toys all work well. Yes, they will get chewed up, and they need regular cleaning and checking to make sure they are still safe.

### Housing & Bedding:

The number of rats you are going to keep will determine the size of the cage, but there should be enough room that each rat will have room not only to eat and sleep but also to play. We recommend nothing smaller than 12" X 24". **POWDER-COATED WIRE CAGES** are durable and easy to clean with good ventilation, although the plastic bottoms can be chewed, litter can be kicked out and fingers mistaken for food when stuck through the bars. **GLASS OR PLASTIC CAGES WITH SCREEN COVERS** keep shavings in and fingers out but do not have enough ventilation during warm weather and must be VERY large. It is a matter of choosing what will work best for you. Rats are very susceptible to heat, so make sure never to place the cage in sunlight and that they have adequate ventilation in warm weather.

**NEVER** use cedar or pine shavings in the bottom of the cage. The aromatic oil in them contains phenol which is very irritating to their respiratory system; these shavings are considered toxic. Aspen or Carefresh® paper shavings are your best bet. The entire cage should be cleaned at least once a week with one animal and more often if there is more than one. Urine buildup in their cage can cause upper respiratory infections, skin lesions, etc. Bleach diluted with water is very good for sterilization, but make sure to rinse thoroughly. **NEVER** use household cleaners. Most use phenol products that are very toxic!

### Diet:

The diet should be well rounded, varied and fresh. Pelleted and premixed foods should always be supplemented with fresh fruits, vegetables, cereals, breads, vitamins, treats, chew sticks and even crickets. Your pet will also enjoy small amounts of other things. Fresh clean water and food should be available at all times.

REMEMBER: if it's not good for you, it's not good for them.

### Heating & Lighting:

Rats do not require extra heat as long as your house doesn't get below 65 degrees and they have plenty of bedding to nest in. If your house does get cold and you'd like to heat the cage, a reptile under-tank heater will work for a glass tank (this does not work on plastic cages), but should be placed only on one end of the tank so your pet can choose to be warmer or colder.

Rats do not require extra lighting other than the ambient light in the room, but it should be light during the day and dark at night to allow for a normal sleep and eating cycle.

### Health & Wellbeing:

Tumors are the most common health problem in domestic rats. Spaying/neutering your rat may increase its lifespan and decrease the potential for reproductive cancers.

Our favorite rat vet is Dr. Karen Obegi at 206-365-1102.