



RAT CARE

The common pet rat (*Rattus norvegicus*) is a small rodent available in a variety of colours and types. They can make good pets due to their intelligence and social nature, and if handled from a young age can be easily trained. They can live between 2.5 – 3.5 years if looked after correctly.

ACCOMMODATION

- Rats should be housed in a large glass or wire enclosure with good ventilation and a layer of sawdust or shavings.
- A nest box should also be provided as a retreat, with paper or hay bedding.
- Rats are very active and inquisitive animals so within the cage, nest material, wheels and toys should be provided. However, be aware that toys will be quickly destroyed, so replaceable cardboard rolls and boxes often provide the best entertainment.
- Wheels should also be of a solid type to prevent injuries.
- Temperature – ensure that the tank is kept out of direct sunlight as these enclosures will easily overheat.
- The tank should be cleaned out at least twice a week to help prevent disease.

COMPANIONS

- Rats are social animals, so will be happiest in a single-sex group or as a breeding pair.
- However, entire (un-neutered) males may fight, so castration may be required to reduce aggression of if opposite sexes are kept together.

WHAT TO FEED

- Rats are naturally omnivorous, eating whatever they can find in the wild.
- In captivity, they may be fed commercial rodent pellets (mixes) with additional fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Small portion of hay daily to be placed in the cage daily.
- 1 large handful of vegetables and some fruit daily.
- 1 table spoon of rat pellets to be given in TOTAL to be scattered in the cage **DO NOT OVER FEED** this can result in obesity.

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- Fresh water in all water bottles daily
- Twice a week give treats: cottage cheese, or ½ table spoon of rat or hamster mix, fruit scattered in the pen.
- Beware overfeeding sugary “treats” as obesity and dental problems are commonly seen.
- Water should always be freely available via a drinking bottle and changed daily.

VACCINATIONS

- No routine vaccinations are currently recommended for rats

NEUTERING

- Male rats may be castrated in order to reduce fighting, or prevent reproduction

PARASITES

- No routine parasite prevention is currently recommended for rats

SIGNS OF ILL HEALTH

- As rats are a prey species they will hide disease, so the first time you see any signs you must act quickly.
- A healthy rat will be bright and alert with clear open eyes, ears and nostrils. Your rat should also be keen to eat and drink, and pass faeces regularly.
- It is important to become familiar with your rat’s normal appearance, movement and behaviour, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage. It is advisable to visit a vet who routinely deals with rats for a general health check at least once a year.
- You should look out for any changes in appetite or faeces passed, as well as changes in weight, behaviour, coat condition or breathing. Other signs of illness include discharges from the eyes, nose or mouth.
- Respiratory disease is common in rats and one of the important agents is *Mycoplasma*. Signs of respiratory infection include a ratty chest, weight loss or sneezing. Any of these require veterinary attention.
- Mammary tumours are also common and can present as swellings over the body from the neck down to the hind legs.
- If you have any concerns, do not hesitate to contact a rat vet as soon as possible.