

## **Caring for a Rat**



Rats are clean, intelligent pets with affectionate personalities. They love to interact with their human family and can be taught a variety of tricks. They are very social and need at least one same-sex rat companion to thrive. With proper care rats live 2-3 years.

### **General**

Rats need daily attention to become trusting and easy to handle. Offering food from your hand, and avoiding loud noises and sudden movements will help to build confidence and soon your rat will enjoy being held. At least 1 hour a day of exercise outside the cage is essential for optimal health, and great fun for the whole family!

### **Housing**

Choose as large a cage as possible for your rats, ideally 18 in X 36 in with several levels and room for toys such as a solid exercise wheel, ladders, tubes and a hammock. The floor should be solid, as wire can injure rats' feet. Place the cage out of direct sunlight and drafts, in an area with family activity. Cover the floor with safe bedding such as Carefresh or Aspen shavings. For your rats' comfort add a nest box filled with soft shredded paper.

### **Diet**

A healthy diet consists of 80% dry food (lab blocks or a commercial mix such as Reggie Rat) and 20% from a variety of fresh vegetables and fruit. Dry food should always be available in a dish or food hopper. Remember to provide a sipper bottle refilled with fresh water daily. Healthy treats can be offered, in moderation.

### **Cleaning**

Scoop soiled areas as needed. Remove all bedding and wash the entire cage, food bowls, and water bottle weekly. Always rinse and dry the cage thoroughly before adding fresh bedding.

### **Fertility**

Rats can reach sexual maturity at five weeks old. It's important that they are accurately sexed and separated before 5 weeks of age to prevent health risks and unwanted babies.

### **Health**

Find an exotics veterinarian experienced in treating rats before you have an emergency. Be observant and consult your vet if you notice signs of illness or injury such as: discharge from the eyes or nose; diarrhea; sneezing, wheezing, monkey-like sounds, or other noisy breathing; head tilting; lumps or bumps; excessive scratching; difficulty urinating or blood in urine.

**Warnings**

Pine and cedar shavings contain harmful oils and should never be used for rats.

**More Info**

The Rat Fan Club: [www.ratfanclub.org](http://www.ratfanclub.org)