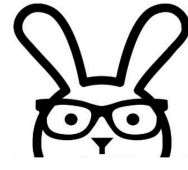


Rat care

Rats are social, smart and interactive animals. They are a great pet for anyone wanting to start off with exotic species and still get a lot of interaction from their pet. They make a good pet for children due to their social nature and shorter lifespan.



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Lifespan:

Average 2-3 years.

As they are social animals they do best living with other rats.

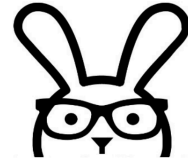
Housing:

- Rats are best housed indoors, in a large metal enclosure such as a large bird cage or a critter nation cage, with lots of shelves, hides and toys. Ensure toys are “rat proof” as they love to gnaw things which could potentially cause issues if ingested.
- Do not keep rats in glass or plastic tanks. These are not well ventilated and are too small. Wood based cages should also be avoided as they are difficult to properly clean due to the porous nature of wood.
- Avoid rat wheels that have holes in which their feet can be trapped.
- Avoid too many solid surfaces to prevent pressure sores on their feet.
- Rats cages should be kept in a cool well ventilated area between 18-26°C, where it's not too loud.
- Humidity in their enclosure should be around 40-55%. High humidity can contribute to respiratory problems.
- Their cage should be spot cleaned daily. The water should be checked and uneaten food should be removed. Check around the cage as rats like to hide their food. Patches of the bedding that are soiled with urine or faeces should be removed and replaced.
- At least once a week the cage should have a deep clean. Bedding and toys should be removed to be cleaned. The cage can be cleaned with a deodorising mix of vinegar and water, or with a veterinary disinfectant such as F10.
- High ammonia build-up in the enclosure can contribute to respiratory disease. If the enclosure is starting to smell it likely needs cleaning more often.
- The best bedding to use in their cage is fleece, care fresh or a paper based bedding.

Exercise and Behaviour:

Rats are commonly active in the evening and throughout the night. This means they can be quite disruptive when kept in a bedroom. They are very curious animals that require a lot of activities to keep them enriched. Toys should focus on enabling them to participate in their natural behaviors such as tunneling, climbing and making nests.

Rats love a lot of interaction and exploring new areas. Having periods of supervised time outside their enclosure to explore a safe space is a great way to provide enrichment. Ensure no predators such as dogs or cats are around. Remove anything they could chew that could cause them harm (such as electrical cords, toxic foods etc.).



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If you are to keep a running wheel in their cage ensure it is a solid wheel. Any wheels with holes can lead to traumatic injuries. Running wheels such as flying saucers may take a while for them to get used to but can provide a lot of enrichment.

Rats are very smart animals and need a lot of activities to keep them entertained, some ideas to keep them entertained are:

- Cardboard mazes
- "Fishing" for peas or corn
- Forage box with shredded paper
- Balls with bells in them (supervised)
- Tunnels
- A box of tissues or roll of toilet paper
- Pet IQ food feeders

Food:

- Obesity is very common with pet rats due to being overfed. Remember that although a treat may look small to our eye, it could be huge to them!
- Their diet should consist of a majority of high quality pellets which have 14-16% protein and 4-6% fat. Pellet brands available in New Zealand that have these levels include Science Selective and Burgess.
- A small amount of fruits and vegetables can be offered daily. Foods such as bread or pasta should be an occasional food as a treat rather than a regular part of their diet.
- Feeding them food too high in protein (such as a lot of meat or inappropriate pellet mixes) can lead to kidney disease.
- As rats are nocturnal it is best to provide food in the evening when they are more active.

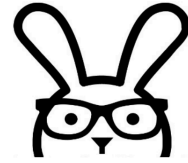
Rats scavenge for their food. A fun way to keep your rats engaged at meal times is to provide their foods in toys. Making them forage through things such as toilet tubes, egg cartons and pet IQ toys is a great way to enrich them. They also love to hide their food around their enclosure. It is recommended to check the cage daily for signs of hidden food to prevent mould forming.

Water is best offered in both a bowl and a bottle as it gives them options as to how they would prefer to drink. A heavy ceramic bowl is the best type of bowl to use as it prevents tipping. A glass sipper bottle is preferred as they are easier to sterilise than the plastic ones. It's important to change the water in the bowl and bottle daily.

Preventative care:

As rats are a small exotic species with a shorter lifespan it is important to have regular checkups with an exotic vet

- It is recommended to have a health check with an exotic vet soon after the adoption of a new rat. Following this it is recommended for the rat to have a health check every 3-6 months to ensure any issues are picked up in their early stages.
- Rats are prone to mammary tumors. It is recommended to spay female rats between 4-7 months of age to prevent these occurring later in life.
- Castration of male rats is recommended to decrease incidents of aggression and to help decrease their odour.
- Rats are also prone to respiratory issues. To prevent these it's important to keep their cage clean so there is no build up of ammonia, keep them in a well ventilated area and ensure the room is kept free of any other scents.



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