



Rat Care Sheet

Basic facts:

The species most commonly encountered as a pet is the domesticated form of the Norway rat: the fancy rat. Common varieties include the standard fancy rat, the dumbo rat and hairless varieties.

Rats are **clean**, friendly and playful pets. If handled correctly they will rarely bite and are usually very interactive with their owners. They can be good pets for calm and respectful older children.

The average life span is 2-3 years.

Rats are very **social** and should ideally be kept in pairs or groups. It is highly advisable to neuter your male rats to **prevent** aggression as well as **unwanted litters**. Spaying females can prevent certain types of cancer.

Rats are sensitive to **smoke and scented products**. These will **irritate the respiratory tract** and can cause a flare-up of underlying disease or predispose to new infections.

Enclosure:

The key is to get the **largest possible cage**. The absolute minimum cage size per rat pair is 90 x 60 x 45cm. However, the goal is to have a large floor space as well as multiple levels and climbing possibilities. Cages with only one level may, however, be recommended by your vet for certain medical conditions.

The cage should have a **solid base** and metal cage bars over sides that provide **good ventilation**. The bars should be placed narrow enough that your rats cannot squeeze through. An aquarium is NOT appropriate.

Be careful to **keep wires and electric cables away** from the cage as rats will chew on them.

Ample, **good-quality nesting material and deep bedding** should be provided. Select a clean, odourless (NO fresh pine or cedar products, NO scented products), non-toxic, absorbent and dust-free substrate. Good products are cellulose bedding, unprinted newsprint, fleece blankets, paper towels and soft paper bedding.

DO NOT USE wood shavings, sawdust and cotton wool. These can lead to vet visits!

Ceramic and stainless steel bowls are best used for offering food. Bottles are the most hygienic for water, but some animals will only accept a bowl.

Rats can be **litter trained**. Use an absorbent, dust-free litter in a large enough litter tray.

Provide **hides** (e.g. cardboard boxes), **hammocks** and **enrichment items** (e.g. wood block chews, toilet paper rolls). A very large exercise wheel with solid sides can increase activity levels.

Clean and disinfect at least twice weekly.



Diet:

A **good quality rat pellet** (e.g. Oxbow, Burgess) provides a complete diet and reduces the risk of obesity. **Avoid muesli mixes** with cheap seeds and corn as these allow for selective feeding and increase the risk of obesity and nutritional deficiencies.

Small amounts of **fresh foods** can be offered daily. Over the course of the week your rat should be given a **variety** of different types of foods. Some foods such as eggs, cheese, seeds should only be offered in moderation (once weekly). Avoid highly processed, junk foods and foods with added sugar.

Examples of healthy foods (not an exclusive list):

- Green beans
- Kale
- Sprouts (you can sprout seeds at home! – see our Jacobiez sprouting mix)
- Pumpkin (raw or cooked) as well as pumpkin seeds
- Blueberries (fresh or frozen)
- Melon / watermelon (great for hydration)
- Cottage cheese
- Rice (brown more nutritious than white)
- Oats (avoid those with added sugars)
- Fresh herbs such as mint and basil

Speak to your exotic-savvy vet about:

Red discharge (porphyrine) around eyes or nose is a warning sign. Some rats may also have discolored front paws after grooming themselves. This can be a sign of stress and illness.

Check for lumps. Rats are notoriously prone to developing cancer and early detection tumors can in many cases slow the progression of the disease or even surgically eliminate it.

Obesity and weight-gain

Sneezing or respiratory sounds.

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Information on this care sheet is the opinion of the creator. This care sheet will be adapted if updated information becomes available.

To order food and enrichment items you can contact Exotic Pets Overberg via whatsapp (071-142-2953) or email admin@exoticpetsoverberg.co.za. Or visit our online shop at www.exoticpetsoverberg.co.za