

Rat Care Sheet

Everything we would tell you across the counter, written down so you can take it home.

Living With Rats | The Enclosure | Diet | Call Your Vet

At A Glance

LIFESPAN
2 to 3 years

COMPANY
Pairs or groups, never alone

CAGE MINIMUM
90 x 60 x 45cm per pair

DIET
Quality rat pellet

NEUTERING
Males, to prevent aggression

AVOID
Smoke and scented products

Living With Rats

- The pet rat is the domesticated Norway rat, the **fancy rat**. Common varieties include the standard fancy rat, the dumbo rat and the hairless types.
- Rats are clean, friendly and playful. Handled properly they rarely bite and are usually very interactive with their owners, which makes them good pets for calm, respectful older children.
- The average lifespan is 2 to 3 years.
- They are **very social** and should be kept in pairs or groups. Neutering males is strongly advisable to prevent aggression and unwanted litters. Spaying females can prevent certain cancers.
- Rats are **sensitive to smoke and scented products**. These irritate the respiratory tract, and can flare up existing disease or open the door to new infections.

Living With Rats | The Enclosure | Diet | Call Your Vet

The Enclosure

- Get the largest cage you can. The absolute minimum per pair is **90 x 60 x 45cm**, but aim for generous floor space plus multiple levels and climbing routes. Your vet may recommend a single level for certain medical conditions.
- Solid base, metal bars on the sides for ventilation, and bars close enough together that a rat cannot squeeze through. **An aquarium is not appropriate.**
- Keep wires and cables well away from the cage. Rats will chew them.
- Provide plenty of good nesting material and deep bedding. Choose a clean, odourless, non-toxic, absorbent, dust-free substrate: cellulose bedding, unprinted newsprint, fleece blankets, paper towels or soft paper bedding. **Never use wood shavings, sawdust or cotton wool**, they lead to vet visits. No fresh pine or cedar, nothing scented.
- Ceramic or stainless steel bowls are best for food. Bottles are the most hygienic for water, though some rats will only drink from a bowl.
- Rats can be litter trained. Use an absorbent, dust-free litter in a large enough tray.
- Give them hides such as cardboard boxes, hammocks, and enrichment like wood block chews and toilet roll tubes. A very large exercise wheel with solid sides raises activity levels.
- Clean and disinfect at least twice weekly.

Living With Rats | The Enclosure | Diet | Call Your Vet

Diet

- A good quality **rat pellet** (Oxbow, Burgess) gives a complete diet and reduces the risk of obesity.
- Avoid muesli mixes with cheap seeds and corn. They let your rat pick out the bits it likes, which drives obesity and nutritional deficiencies.
- Small amounts of fresh food daily, varied across the week. Eggs, cheese and seeds are for moderation only, about once a week. Nothing highly processed, no junk food, nothing with added sugar.
- **Good fresh foods:** green beans, kale, sprouts (try our Jacobiez sprouting mix), pumpkin raw or cooked and its seeds, blueberries fresh or frozen, melon and watermelon for hydration, cottage cheese, rice with brown more nutritious than white, oats without added sugar, and fresh herbs such as mint and basil. That list is a starting point, not a limit.

Speak To Your Exotic-Savvy Vet About

- **Red discharge around the eyes or nose.** This is porphyrin, and it is a warning sign. Some rats also show discoloured front paws after grooming. Both can mean stress or illness.
- **Lumps.** Rats are notoriously prone to cancer. Caught early, many tumours can be slowed or removed surgically.
- Obesity and weight gain.
- Sneezing or any respiratory sound.

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