



# Introduction to Rat Care

Melissa Magnuson DVM

Rats are very intelligent, tame animals. When properly socialized, they rarely bite and make wonderful pets. Rats are social animals that like to play, so they can be housed together. Be careful not to house male and female rats together if you do not intend to breed!

---

## Housing

Rats are very agile and can escape many enclosures. Use an extra large aquarium or a cage specifically made for larger rodents. The Midwest Critter Nation cage is a good choice. It must be large enough to accommodate a rat-sized exercise wheel, with ample space to run around and play. Multi-level cages are great for this reason. An enclosure with solid flooring is preferred because it is easier to clean than wire or mesh. It is important that the top of the enclosure is secure because rats are escape artists!

Carefresh (recycled paper) makes for great bedding. The bedding should be changed at least twice weekly. Place plain/perfume/dye-free tissue paper and cardboard rolls in the enclosure for additional nesting material. Clean the cage once a week with mild soap and water and RINSE the cage thoroughly before returning your rat to the cage.

Rats need plenty of toys to keep them entertained! You'll need a large supply of toys to rotate every few days to prevent boredom. Rats love tunnels, hammocks, wood chews, toys that hang from the cage, cardboard rolls, and home-made toys.

## Diet

Rats should be offered rat-specific pelleted food throughout the day. We recommend Oxbow Animal Health Essentials Rat Food. We do not recommend food mixes that contain pretty seeds and nuts. Your rat will



eat their preferred foods and leave the healthy items behind. Feed your rat(s) in a thick ceramic bowl to avoid spilling.

Rats on a high-quality pelleted diet do not need treats. However, some rats will enjoy eating vegetables occasionally. Offer only in small amounts. Rats can be cautious eaters and may avoid strange foods, including treats.

Fresh water should be available at all times. Use a thick ceramic bowl or water bottle. Clean your pet's bowl or water bottle often.

## Spay & Neuter

It is important to neuter male rats even if they are not housed with females. Neutering will help to prevent aggression and urine-marking behaviors from developing after puberty. It will also prevent testicular tumors which are prevalent in intact older males. It is best to neuter your rat before he reaches sexual maturity at the age of 4-5 weeks. Spaying females will reduce the chances of uterine and mammary cancers. Female rats can be spayed once they reach 180 grams in weight.

## Signs of Illness

Call us if you notice any of the following signs of disease:

- Lumps/bumps
- Sneezing
- Runny nose/eyes
- Hair loss
- Itchy skin
- Diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing

Rats are prone to developing tumors as they get older. These tumors can grow quickly, and they are easier to remove when they are small. Rats are also susceptible to respiratory infections. Rats are small animals, and medical issues can be challenging to treat in advanced stages. Do not wait to schedule an appointment if you have concerns.

## Preventive Care

We recommend a yearly examination for your pet rat, as signs of disease can be subtle. A yearly exam can identify problems before they become advanced. It is important to become familiar with your rat so you know what is normal for them. If you notice any changes in appearance or behavior, please give us a call.