

# Rats

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Rats are intelligent active pets who love to interact with their owner. They are a lot like little dogs and will learn their name and come when you call them. They are playful and will wrestle with their owner's hand. They can learn lots of tricks too.

Rats are affectionate and love to be petted. Some rats will lick their owner like a dog. They are very clean animals and groom themselves several times a day.

Rats are easy to care for and make great interactive pets for people of all ages!

## **One rat or more?**

A single rat will do well if it can be with you for several hours a day.

## **Male or female?**

As adults, male rats are larger than females and tend to be more laid back, making better lap pets. Female rats tend to be very active. Males are easy to identify by their large testicles.

## **Feeding**

The basic rat diet should be a commercial rat block or fortified grain mix. It is also good to give rats a wide variety of fruits and veggies and other healthy foods. Treats are great for training and strengthening the bond between you and your rats and can comprise 10% of their diet.

## **Housing**

A rat cage should be at least 24" X 12" X 12" tall, and the bigger the better to provide room for lots of fun toys. The floors of the cage should be solid, not wire, to protect their feet. Wire cages provide better ventilation, but large aquariums can be used. For bedding you should use pet litter of recycled paper or organic pellets such as Carefresh. Do not use clay litter, pine or cedar shavings since the shavings cause respiratory infection. Some rats will use a litter box. Rats must be kept at temperatures below 90 degrees F and they require complete darkness at night.

## **Accessories**

Rats need a water bottle, a dry food dispenser and a dish for moist food. For their bed choose from plastic, wood, or grass houses and/or a hammock. They also enjoy an exercise wheel, tubes, and climbing toys such as ladders, ropes, and branches, and chew toys.

## **Sanitation**

Clean the cage and accessories weekly. Be sure to scrub all parts of the water bottle.

### **Maintenance**

Rats are easy maintenance pets and do not need special care, but you do need to play with them every day. A bird pedicure perch or similar toys in the cage will help keep their toenails short.

### **Health care**

The most common health problem in rats is a respiratory infection. Having female rats spayed will help prevent mammary tumors. Veterinary Pet Insurance ([www.petinsurance.com](http://www.petinsurance.com)) now offers health insurance policies for rats.

### **Special needs**

If you let your rat play on the floor, the room must be “rat-proofed” to remove electrical cords and other items that shouldn’t be chewed. If you let your rat play on your couch or bed, a washable throw cover will help protect your furnishings. Never grab the tip of a rat’s tail because the skin will come off.

### **Life cycle**

Rats live an average of 2-2 1/2 years, although it’s possible for them to live 5 years. Rats can breed as early as 5 weeks of age but should not until 3-4 months. The gestation period is 21-23 days and the average litter size is 12. The babies are called pups and their eyes open at 2 weeks. The pups can be weaned at 4 weeks.

### **Expert Help**

If you have questions about your rat, do not hesitate to contact us. We will be happy to help you choose a rat care book for more complete information. You, your veterinarian, and the staff here at the store will form the team, which will be responsible for your rat’s well being.

In addition, you can contact The Rat Fan Club for more information about rats. Their website is [www.ratfanclub.org](http://www.ratfanclub.org) or you can send a self-addressed stamped envelope to 857 Lindo Lane, Chico CA for a sample issue of their monthly newsletter.

### **Supplies Checklist**

Large cage

Bedding and/or litter

Dry food dispenser

Water bottle

Litter box (optional)

Activity toys

Chew toys

Bed

Rat food

Treats

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