

rat

care sheet



Rats are intelligent, extremely social and enjoy human interaction.

facts

average adult size: 8 inches long
average life span: up to 5 years with proper care
diet: omnivores



Note: The information on this Care Sheet is not a substitute for veterinary care. If you need additional information, refer to the Sources section or contact your veterinarian as appropriate.

Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

diet

A well-balanced rat diet consists of:

- High-quality rat food or lab blocks and limited amounts of grains, vegetables and fruits.
- Clean, fresh, filtered, chlorine-free water, changed daily.
- Do **not** feed chocolate, caffeine or alcohol as these can cause serious medical conditions. Avoid sugar and high-fat treats.

feeding

Things to remember when feeding your rat:

- Fresh food and water should always be available.
- A limited amount of grain, vegetables and fruits can be given daily but should not exceed 10% of their total diet.
- Vegetables and fruits not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.

housing

- Rats acclimate well to average household temperatures, not to exceed 80°F; be cautious of extreme temperature changes. The habitat should never be in direct sunlight or in a drafty area.
- Habitat should be plastic, metal or glass and escape-proof with a solid bottom; there should be plenty of room for the rat to exercise and play. It is best to provide the largest habitat possible. Rats love to climb so a tall habitat is recommended to challenge your rat.
- 1 to 2" of bedding should be placed in the habitat; proper bedding includes high-quality paper bedding, crumbled paper bedding or hardwood shavings. Cedar-based products are not recommended.
- Rats can be kept in same-sex pairs if they are raised together; otherwise, house rats separately. Different types of small animals should **not** be housed together.

normal behavior and characteristics

- Play during the night and rest during the day (nocturnal) but can adjust to your schedule.
- Hide in objects but will come out when people come near the habitat.
- Chew on objects to maintain incisor teeth, which grow continuously; ensure they have plenty of wood chew sticks or mineral chews.

habitat maintenance

- Clean and disinfect the habitat and its contents at least once a week with to a 3% bleach solution. Rinse and allow to dry completely before placing the rat back into the habitat.
- Remove wet spots daily; change bedding at least once a week, or more often as necessary.

grooming and hygiene

- Rats stay clean and rarely need baths, but can be spot-cleaned with a damp washcloth or unscented baby wipes if needed.

- Consult with a veterinarian if a rat's teeth seem too long.

signs of a healthy animal

- Active, alert, and sociable
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Healthy fur and clear eyes
- Breathing is unlabored
- Walks normally

red flags

- Weight loss
- Abnormal hair loss
- Diarrhea or dirty bottom
- Distressed breathing
- Lethargic
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Skin lesions
- Overgrown teeth

If you notice any of these signs, contact your veterinarian.

common health issues

Health Issue	Symptoms or Causes	Suggested Action
Diarrhea	Loose stool caused by poor diet, stress, internal parasites, unclean housing or other illness.	Consult with a veterinarian to determine cause and treatment.
Malocclusion	Overgrown teeth.	Consult with a veterinarian to have teeth trimmed regularly.
Respiratory disease	Sneezing, cough, red-colored discharge from eyes and nose.	Consult with a small animal veterinarian.
Skin lesions, mammary tumors.	Sores on skin, abnormal lumps.	Consult with a small animal veterinarian.

shopping list for needed supplies

- Appropriately sized habitat
- High-quality rat food
- Treats
- Bedding
- Nesting fluff
- Food bowl/water bottle
- Hideaway place
- Toys
- Large exercise ball
- Hammock
- Wood chews
- Mineral chews
- Chew tubes
- Book about rats

sources

Ask a store partner about Petco's selection of books on rats and the variety of private brand products available for the care and happiness of your new pet. All private brand products carry a 100% money-back guarantee.

Because all small animals are potential carriers of infectious diseases, such as Lymphocytic Choriomeningitis, Rat Bite Fever and *Salmonella*, always wash your hands before and after handling your small animal or habitat contents to help prevent the potential spread of disease.

Pregnant women, children under the age of 5, senior citizens and people with weakened immune systems should contact their physician before purchasing or caring for small animals and should consider not having a small animal as a pet.

Go to cdc.gov/healthypets and petco.com/caresheet for more information about small animals and disease.

This Care Sheet can cover the care needs of other species. Go to petco.com for more information.

