



Basics of Caring for Rats

1. Diet

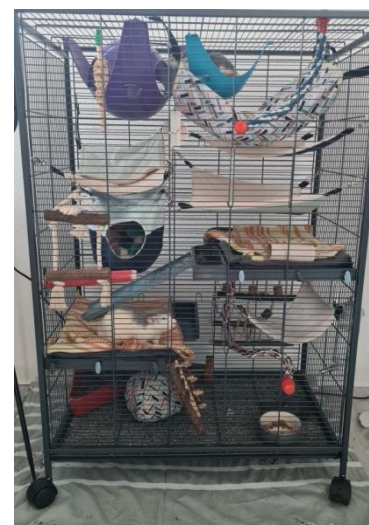
It is recommended to feed your rats unlimited kibbles and we recommend the brands Oxbow or Martin's Little Friends. It is best to avoid seed mixtures as this can cause your rats to become picky and only eat their favourite foods, in turn, missing out on the necessary nutritional components of others. Rats are omnivores so their main kibble diet should be supplemented with cooked meat (chicken is most suitable), either cooked or uncooked whole grain pasta, fresh vegetables, and limited fruits. These can all be given in small amounts throughout the week. Consider putting your rats' food in foraging toys to help keep them active and enriched. Lastly, ensure that your rats have access to fresh water at all times; a water bottle can be hung on their cage to keep the water clean.



2. Cage Set Up

Rats are very prone to respiratory issues and this is important to keep in mind when setting up their cage. For the cage itself, it needs to be a large wire cage with a solid bottom that allows air flow. Do not house your rats in a tank as too much ammonia from their urine can build up and cause respiratory problems. For their bedding, we recommend using a paper bedding like Care-Fresh and to avoid woodchips because they can be too dusty and can contain oils that, again, cause respiratory problems for your rats. Fleece can also be used in your rats' cage to line the bottom or any platforms but be sure to wash them regularly when they get soiled. Rats can be trained to use a litter box, so consider adding one to your cage with a dust free paper litter to help keep the cage cleaner. The cage and litter should be spot cleaned every day and thoroughly cleaned once a week.

Rats are also very intelligent and active so their cage should have lots of enrichment toys for them to interact with. Things like climbing toys, ladders, wooden chew toys, foraging toys, burrowing boxes with rags or hay, and a large, solid wheel are great additions to any cage. For added enrichment, try rearranging or swapping out the cage accessories on a regular basis. *Tip: check out the bird section of the





pet store as they have lots of ladders and toys that can be suitable for rats.

As much as rats are active, they also like their sleep time. Rats enjoy cozy and safe places to eat and sleep so having huts, tunnels, and hammocks at varying levels is a great way to keep your rats comfortable in their cage.

3. Enrichment

Rats are highly intelligent and social animals; for this reason it is absolutely necessary to have at least two rats so they are able to keep each other company. Along with all of the toys and enrichments inside their cages, rats would benefit from time spent with you outside of their cages. Because of their social nature, rats can form a strong bond with their owners and enjoy spending time cuddling and playing with you. Be sure that you have a rat safe area to hang out in and always supervise your rats while they are out because they are curious and can get into trouble when you are not watching. Some things to do with your rats are obstacle courses, training (rats can be taught much like dogs to do tricks like spin, stand, and give a paw), and pea fishing (adding peas to a bowl of water for them to try to grab).



4. Preventative Care

Unfortunately, rats do not have a very long lifespan. The average lifespan of a rat is about 2 years, depending on the breed, and they are predisposed to developing tumors (particularly female rats). We recommend regular routine veterinary checkups to better monitor your rats' health so you can take any preventative care actions needed.

As previously discussed, rats' respiratory systems are sensitive and it's important to keep that in mind, not only with what you are putting in their cage but what is in their greater environment. It's ideal to clean your vents regularly and be mindful of things like body sprays, air fresheners, detergents, incense, smoke, and candles as the strong fragrance (especially in laundry detergents if you choose to use fleece padding or washing hammocks/fabrics hides) can be an irritant to your rats. In drier weather, you can try using a nebulizer or giving your rats a steam bath to help ease the stress to their respiratory systems. It can help to invite your friends for a hot, steamy shower.