



Rats

Rattus norvegicus

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Common strains of pet rats are: Sprague-Dawley/Wistar-Lewis, white rats and Long-Evans, hooded rats. They are good natured pets that rarely bite and are usually social with other rats. Rats are nocturnal, meaning they are most active at night. They are very smart and are usually easily food motivated to learn tricks. The male is called the sire, the female the dam. They can start breeding at 2 months old, with babies born in 3-4 weeks after. Mother rats tend to be good parents. There are usually 6-12 babies in a litter, that can be weaned at 3 weeks old. Rats usually live 2-3 years. Adult males should weigh 450-520g, and adult females 250-300g.

Housing: Wire cages allow better air circulation, but be careful that your pet isn't chewing through or squeezing between bars. Watch out for escape artists! Be sure the cage base is solid or padded with enough bedding to prevent animals from standing on bare wire. Rats can usually get along well when housed together, just be sure to watch for aggression and separate them if they aren't getting along. Aquariums and plastic cages need to be cleaned more frequently than wire cages, which should be cleaned every four days. The cage should be lined with several inches of pelleted paper or shredded newspaper for burrowing. Wood shavings, can make any underlying respiratory conditions worse, because they tend to be dusty. Avoid cedar, walnut and pine shavings, as their strong smell and some oils contained in the wood can be irritating. Cardboard is a good chew toy for enrichment. Wood and other hard materials can damage the teeth if chewed too vigorously. Be careful not put cloth, or anything that can get wrapped around legs, into the cage. A hidebox is important to relieve stress and provide a place for the nocturnal creatures to spend the day. The temperature should be kept at 65-75F. A water bottle (with no added vitamins!) should be provided fresh daily. Rodents can see blue, green and yellow, but not red. As a result, red transparent play tubes or hutches can allow you to get a good look at your pet while helping them feel a little safer.

Diet: Free choice commercial rat/rodent pellets (protein of 20-27%), supplemented with fresh veggies, particularly leafy greens are best. Avoid: seed diets, sugary foods/treats, and cheese. Just because they like it does not mean it is healthy for them! Almonds in the shell make good occasional treats and chew toys.

More on the back!

Health care: Rats can be very good at hiding illness. We recommend exams every 6 months to make sure your pet is healthy. Weighing your pet at home can be a good way to catch illnesses early. Please bring them in to see us if their weight changes by 10%, or more. Dental problems, particularly over grown teeth, are common. Spaying helps prevent reproductive tumors, and unexpected pregnancies, and has been shown to increase rats' lifespans. It is ideal to spay rats between 3 and 6 months of age. Rats can also produce a reddish secretion called porphyrin from the nose or eyes when they are sick or stressed. Your veterinarian can help differentiate this from blood and try to find the cause of the stress. The sooner we see any disease, the easier it is to treat!

