

Rat Care Guide

Prepared by Dr. Lucy Haile on behalf of Wellesley Animal Hospital

HOUSING

Cage:

- Provide the largest cage possible to allow your rat ample space to move around
- Wire cages with plastic bottoms are ideal for rats as they provide good ventilation
- Provide hiding boxes in the cage such as paper towel rolls and cardboard boxes with bedding or hay in the bottom for your rat to nest in



Bedding:

- Always use unscented bedding and avoid cedar and pine shavings – strongly smelling bedding can cause irritation to the nose and lungs and contribute to respiratory disease
- CareFresh or recycled newspaper beddings (e.g. Yesterday's News) are recommended as they are good absorbable unscented materials
- Ensure to clean the bedding regularly – spot clean the bedding daily and change all the bedding 2-3 times a week. Cleaning the cage is especially important for rats as they are very prone to respiratory disease. Ammonia builds up in the cage when it isn't cleaned regularly causing irritation to the nose and lungs

NUTRITION

- Always have fresh water available via a drinking bottle

Pellets

- Commercial rat diets such as Oxbow Essentials Rat Food should make up the majority of the diet
- Avoid pellets that are sold as “mixes” containing seeds, fruits or nuts – your rat may pick out their favorite food and often not obtain the balanced diet they need. They can also be too high in fats leading to excessive weight gain



Fresh Produce

- A small amount of vegetables and fruits can be offered daily
- Choose low sugar fruits such as berries
- Add new foods slowly and one at a time to prevent stomach upset and diarrhea

Hay

- Grass hay such as timothy, orchard, oat or botanical hay can always be available to your rat
- Hay allows for natural foraging behavior and can help prevent obesity in your rat
- Timothy hay tunnels can also provide great enrichment and enjoyment to your rat

Treats

- 1-2 sunflower seeds or 1-2 peanuts should be limited to twice a week. Healthy table foods such as unsweetened cereal can also be used. Be sure to avoid sugary, salty or fatty treats as obesity is common in rats

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BEHAVIOR

- Rats are social animals who ideally should be housed in groups
- Ensure rats are neutered/spayed or of the same gender if housed together to prevent unintentional breeding
- Male rats may require neutering even if housed as single sex groups to reduce aggression and fighting. Contact your veterinarian to discuss neutering and spaying
- A variety of toys such as ropes and a solid floor exercise wheel should be provided to keep your rat entertained

HEALTH CARE

- Rats by nature hide symptoms and signs of illnesses making early detection of disease difficult
- New patient exams and yearly examinations are therefore strongly recommended to help your rat live a long and happy life
- Spaying and neutering of rats is recommended at around 6 months of age to help decrease the incidence of mammary tumors which are common as rats age
- If you notice any changes to your rat's behavior, appetite or bowel movements we would recommend contacting your veterinarian immediately