

Rats make good family pets. They are intelligent and interactive; they become tame when handled regularly. Fancy rats are descendants of the brown rats, which originated from Asia.

Rats use their tails for balance.

Rats are social animals and it is strongly recommended that they are kept in single sex pairs or groups. This gives them the opportunity to interact.

It is best to introduce animals to live together when they are young.

The average life-span is two and a half years.

Choosing and buying your rat

There are many colours available such as white or albino, Hooded, Agouti and Cinnamon. There is also a Rex variety with curly coat and whiskers.

Whichever variety you decide on your rat should be a minimum of 4 weeks old.

A healthy rat should be:

- Bright and alert
- Have no signs of discharge from eye, ears, mouth and nose
- Have a clean anal area
- Have a glossy coat with no bald patches and no have sores on the skin
- Should have no signs of breathing problems
- Should move around the cage easily
- Should feel well covered and not bony

Housing

A cage of at least 60cm x 35cm x 25cm will give your rat adequate space.

However they love to climb and will appreciate separate areas for feeding, sleeping and exercise. Cages specially designed for rats will usually be of plastic and wire and may be on two or more levels. Most importantly they must be escape proof.

Rats will enjoy a varied environment with branches, tunnels and ropes. Soft wood, a dust-free paper based product makes an ideal floor covering. Your rat will also appreciate a nest box with soft shredded paper.

Rats are clean in their habits but will need their bedding changed and their cage cleaned with a pet-safe disinfectant at least once a week.

As rats are indoor pets they should be kept in an even temperature ideally between 16 C and 22 C. You should avoid putting the cage in drafts, direct sunlight or in damp or humid conditions.

Rats are inquisitive and active therefore they should be provided with as much stimulation as possible. Try and buy a selection of toys and rotate them to avoid boredom.

Feeding and water

Rats are omnivores and so will enjoy a varied diet. A complete rat mix should be the basis of the diet. This can be supplemented with small amounts of fruit and the occasional boiled egg. Uneaten fruit should be removed the next day.

Most rats will enjoy a mineral block which should be available for their use.

Food bowls should be sturdy, gnaw proof and easily disinfected. Rhubarb or avocado can upset your rats stomach but unlike us they cannot be sick.

Fresh drinking water should always be available for your rat. It should be provided by a water bottle designed to fit your rat cage.

Handling

Handling your rat will often help them build up a relationship with you. When you first get your rat home allow him 24 hours to get used to his environment. Allow your rat to sniff your hands before handling him; this will get him used to your smell. Stroke your rat and be sure he is facing you, then cup both hands around him and pick him up.

Always concentrate when holding your rat as he will be quick and can slip out of your hands.

Never pick your rat up by the tail.

General care

Rats normally stay healthy throughout their lives. They can suffer from sneezing and breathing problems. Ensure you are using an appropriate dust-free bedding in your rats cage.

If sneezing and breathing problems persist, contact your vet. Rats can get mites in their fur; recommended small animal sprays can usually deal with these.

Your rat's teeth constantly grow and are worn down. You can help him do this by providing him with a mineral block or wooden chews. Overgrown teeth will result in weight loss and must be treated by clipping.

If you are concerned about your rats health speak to your vet.

Shopping List - all available from Pets Pad

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|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Feed bowl | Dust free floor covering |
| Soft bedding | Rat food |
| Wooden chew toys | Mineral stone |
| Tubes or other toys | Vitamin drops |
| Pet safe disinfectant | Water bottle and bottle brush |
| Escape proof cage | Book on rat care |

