

## Is this the right pet for me?

Specially bred for their looks and temperament for at least one hundred years, pet rats are curious, intelligent creatures that are easily tamed and can make rewarding, inexpensive pets. They have been described as dogs in a smaller package! Pet rats are highly social animals and are best kept in same sex pairs (ideally littermates), or small groups. Rats are nocturnal, so they are most active at night. As a rule, males are larger and somewhat lazier than females, and have a coarser coat. Females are smaller and tend to be more active and playful. Pet rats come in a variety of colours and coat types (e.g. standard/smooth, rex, hairless).

## Recommended for...

- People with at least an hour a day to spend with their rat
- Older children or teenagers
- Apartment dwellers

## Lifespan

2-3 years

## Feeding

Your rat's diet should low in both fat and calories. A combination of commercial rodent food blocks or pellets, seed and grain mix, and fresh fruits and vegetables is the easiest way to feed rats. Avoid seed and grain mixes as staple diets, as rats tend to pick out their favourite bits and leave everything else, which not only wastes the food, but creates an unbalanced diet. Fresh fruit and vegetables can also be used as treats, but should make up no more than 20% of your rat's diet. Overfeeding may cause diarrhoea and other health concerns like obesity.

Always provide free access to fresh, cool water, especially in summer.



## NEW RAT CHECKLIST

Here's a list of the essentials you'll need for your new rat. Please ask any of the Best Friends team to help you with your selections.

### Essential equipment

- Secure cage and bedding
- Heavy feed dish or a bowl which attaches to the side of the cage
- Heavy water bowl or a bottle which attaches to the side of the cage
- Wooden chew block
- Nest box for sleeping
- An exercise wheel
- A litter box and suitable litter (if you want to try litter training your rats)

### Food

- A supply of commercial rat cubes and pellets or a rat appropriate seed and grain mix
- A mixture of fresh fruit & vegetables
- Some fresh hay

### Your rat will also love...

A changing selection of toys (ferret or cat toys are most suitable), cubby houses, cardboard boxes, climbing ladders and tunnels to hide and play in.

## Special Offer:



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# Caring for your Rat





## Housing

Unlike wild rats, pet rats are not adapted to living outside in the elements. If you absolutely have to have them outside, make sure they are sheltered from the sun, wind and rain. Do not expose them to temperatures above 24C or below 7C. In hot or cold weather they must come indoors, either inside your house or a weatherproof shed.

Your rats need a warm, clean and dry wire cage. It must be made of a strong material that will resist attempts to chew through it. House male and female rats separately. Try to get a tall cage with multiple levels, as rats love to climb and need plenty of room to play. The larger cage, the better, but your rat's house should have a minimum base area of 60 x 30 cm. The floor should be covered with a solid material to prevent the wire from damaging their feet. A cage can be easily converted into a rat adventure playground with a little imaginative use of ropes, ladders, tree branches, PVC pipes, shelves, hammocks or flowerpots attached to the sides.

Litter is placed in the cage to absorb moisture from urine and droppings. By drying out droppings, it stops them decomposing and smelling. Bedding is used in the nest box to make a comfortable bed and also to absorb urine. The best type of bedding is wood shavings or litter made from paper pulp, which should be changed at least once a week. Wooden chew blocks are necessary to keep your rat's teeth trimmed, as their teeth grow continuously.

## Handling

Rats are not difficult to tame if they are socialised and gently handled from a young age. Rats love to be petted and thrive on attention, so should be handled every day. They enjoy being rubbed behind their ears or scratched on their shoulders. Some rats will roll over on their back so their owner can rub their tummy. Many rats will lick their owners to show affection just like a dog. Rats have big personalities and bond strongly to their owners, and make playful, sensitive pets.

## Litter Training

Rats are very intelligent and will naturally try to keep their toilet area away from their food and sleeping areas. With a bit of persistence, rats can be trained to do their droppings in a litter box. Although it can take several weeks, training will make it much easier to clean out your rat's cage and means you can put down a litter box when they are free-ranging to avoid mess in the house. However, even when litter trained, male rats will mark out their territory with little spots of urine.

Place a litter tray filled with litter in the corner of the cage where your rats usually go to the toilet. Remove all litter from the rest of the cage, or use a different type of bedding e.g. soft towels. It's essential that your rats can distinguish between the toilet area and the living area. If you find a few rat droppings outside of the box, pick them up and place them in the litter box so your rats can smell them and realise that this is their toilet area.

If your pet rat defecates where it shouldn't, lift the rat (and the droppings) back into the litter box and tell it gently (but firmly) "No". If it goes in the litter box, lavish it with praise and give it a favourite treat. Your rat will soon learn to visit the toilet area when it needs to relieve itself.

## Grooming

Pet rats like to keep themselves clean, but on occasion you may need to bathe your rat. Fill a bathtub with warm water, just up to the rat's shoulders, so he can swim if he wishes and use a kitten/puppy shampoo. Avoid getting soap in his eyes and ears, and have a dry towel ready. Give your rat a treat as soon as his bath is over.

## Exercise

To stay happy and healthy, your rat should have at least an hour of exercise each day. Provide a safe, large area for your rat to run around and explore. Protect areas that they may get into but can't get out of, like behind refrigerators, inside chairs or sofas, or behind immovable shelving. Make sure that all electric cords are out of reach as rats love to chew them.

## Health

Rats kept in clean bedding, with regular good quality food, generally don't have too many health problems. Rats should be alert and active with a firm and well rounded body. The nose, eyes, ears, and rear end should be clean and free from discharge. If your rat's breathing becomes laboured, and or it is sneezing or has discharge from its nose or eyes, it may have a respiratory disease. Drooling or wetness around the mouth can be a sign of dental problems. If you have any concerns about your pet rat, separate it from the others and observe it closely. If the problem persists, seek veterinary advice. The OurVet™ Team in our store will be happy to talk to you about any health issues concerning your pet rat.

**Emergency Treatment during the guarantee period:** If your Rat develops diarrhoea which persists for more than 24 hours, or becomes severe, or has any other health problems during the guarantee period, please contact the OurVet™ team in store.

## Responsible pet ownership

In some areas there are restrictions on the number and types of pets you are allowed to keep. Check with your local government for further information on your rights and responsibilities.

