

# Rat Care Sheet

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**Lifespan:** 2-6 years

**Length:** 32.4-46.4cm

**Weight:** 0.11-0.34kgs (Adult Rat)

**Cage size:** Minimum of 70cm L” 50cm H”

**Gestation period:** 21 days

**Behaviour:**

Pet rats are domesticated animals and as different from wild rats as dogs are from wolves. They are very clean and rarely bite. Rats are smart enough to learn their names and come when you call them. They are social, affectionate animals who form strong bonds with their owners. They beg to come out of their cage to play or be petted. They are smart enough to play interactive games with people like tug-of-war, hide-n-seek, and wrestling, and they can learn tricks.

**Bedding:** Carefresh, critter crumbles - rats are sensitive to allergies/ respiratory disease. For this reason wood shavings should not be used for Rats.

**Training ability:** Excellent. Rats can even be toilet trained

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## What you need to house your pet Rat:

- Cage (bigger the better)
- Bedding (Carefresh, critter crumbles)
- Rodent origins pellets, fruit and vegetables
- Salt licks, wood chews, toys
- Wormer syrup, Mite & Lice spray, Vitamin drops, Shampoo, Cage cleaner
- Food dish, water bottle
- Plastic house (to nest and keep warm in)
- Cage cover (to cover at night)
- Brush, nail clippers

## **DIET:**

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Dry mix of corn, crushed peas and special biscuit and pellets. Do not overdose your rat on protein by allowing its diet to be too rich in peanuts or sunflower seeds, or it could get spots and sores. They also require fresh fruit and vegetables every day. A salt lick is important for rats in captivity, particularly in warmer weather when they can lose a lot of salt. Salt licks also help keep teeth trim and sharp.

## **WHAT TO FEED:**

Vetafarm pellets (Rodent Origins) fruits and vegetables

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### Vegetables:

Sprouts, Spinach, Turnip Greens, Swiss chard, Mustard Greens, Broccoli, Escarole, Chicory, Tomatoes, Beet Greens, Bok Choy, Grated Carrots, Collard greens, Corn on the Cob, Endive, Kale, Yams. Dried beans (always cook or fully sprout first). Pumpkin and Sweet Potato can also be given to your pet, however it is better when they are cooked.

### Fruits:

Cantaloupe, Apricots, Nectarines, Papayas, Peaches Apples, Bananas, Grapes, Oranges. Make sure your bird does not have any seeds from fruits, some can be very dangerous, like Cherry pits as they may contain trace amounts of cyanide.

### Extra dietary foods:

It's OK for your rat to eat cooked eggs (hard boiled or scrambled), yogurt, cottage cheese and peanuts in very small amounts. Other foods that can be included into their diet in small amounts are whole wheat pasta and bread, brown rice, unsweetened cereals and small dog biscuits. Special treats – Whole nuts in the shell (almonds, Brazil nuts, and walnuts), Sunflower seeds (high in fat), and carob chips.

### WHAT NOT TO FEED:

- Salty foods, processed sugar, rhubarb, greasy foods, Mangos, Avocado, chocolate, potato, fruit seeds/pips, , alcohol, caffeine, garlic, onion, tobacco, cabbage, raw potato, asparagus, eggplant, milk, cream, sugar and high fat treats.

*Fresh water should be supplied each morning, make sure the dish is well scrubbed to remove slime or faecal matter.*

## Housing

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*The larger the cage the better, your rat should be able to run about freely with plenty of space to add toys, hammocks, bedding and room for exercise. It is important to consider spacing between the bars as you wouldn't want to risk your rat's head getting stuck or them getting out. It is important to give your rat plenty of enrichment toys to prevent boredom. We recommend adding tunnels, rope toys, treat balls and/or hammocks inside the enclosure to give them plenty of mental stimulation during the day. A bored rat can become lonely and depressed, for this reason we normally recommend getting them in pairs (same sex). Keeping in mind the more rats you have the bigger the enclosure needs to be. Rats will groom each other, play and snooze together. Unlike birds keeping them in pairs does not mean they will be less social with their owners. However, rats can be kept alone so long as they are given lots of love and kept in an area where they are made feel like part of the family. Keep your furry friends in a draft free and safe area. Cover the enclosure at night (especially during winter) with a towel or blanket to stop drafts and to reduce stress to the rats. They are highly intelligent little creatures that love to keep active (especially when young). Make each day exciting and challenging for them by providing them with toys and vary their treats up as much as possible. Contrary to popular belief, rats themselves are very clean (unlike wild rats) they constantly groom themselves and can even be toilet trained from a young age. It is important to clean the cage, replace substrate (carefresh or critter crumbles/ dust free bedding) and clean all toys and bowls at least once a week, depending of the size of the cage and how many rats are being housed together. Replace dishes, and toys when worn or damaged. Ensure that there are no habitat parts or toys with lead, zinc or*

lead-based paints or galvanized parts as these can cause serious medical issues if ingested by your rat. For this reason it is important that a natural cleaning product be used when cleaning occurs. Be sure to reduce the amount of chemicals used throughout the house (flea bombs, moxite sprays etc) as these fumes can be harmful. Rats cannot be housed together with any other pet (guinea pig, mouse etc) as they can become aggressive if threatened or can be vulnerable to a larger guinea pig.

### DENTAL CARE:

**Rats have incisors and molars.** Incisors are the four, long, sharp front teeth, two on top and two on the bottom. Rat incisors are highly specialized for gnawing. They are open-rooted, which means they grow throughout life. Molars are the rearmost teeth in the mouth, used for grinding food prior to swallowing it. Rats have 12 molars, six on the top and six on the bottom (and three on each side of each jaw). As rats teeth keep growing it is important to provide them with salt licks and wooden chews to help keep them trim.

### Recommended toys-

- Natural wood toys (these are particularly great for gnawing the teeth and nails down)
- Lofa shapes
- Colourful block toys with chains
- Toys with approved leather attached
- Snugly hammocks and tunnels (to keep us warm and safe)
- Exercise wheel (make sure they are RAT approved)
- Treat cabob, treat balls (enrichment toys to help reduce boredom)
- Cat cage balls (we love to roll these around)

## Treatments

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**Mite and Lice spray-** Your FURRY friend should be treated with mite & lice spray every 3 months as prevention. If you are "treating" for mite and lice they should be treated twice a day for up to 14 days. The enclosure should also be regularly cleaned (remove all bedding every 2 days to remove eggs and larvae of the mite and lice). Keep a close eye on their skin during this time. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

**Signs of mite and lice are:** Excess scratching, redness and hair loss may occur. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

**Wormer:** Your rat should be treated with a wormer treatment every 3 months as a preventative as well as a treatment.

**Signs of worms:** The common signs are weight loss, diarrhoea and loss of appetite. Treat your rat if you notice these symptoms or every 3 months. If symptoms persist visit an animal care facility or a vet.

**Shampoo:** Rats can be bathed regularly with a small animal friendly shampoo.

**Vitamin drops:** Can be added into the water bottle daily for added vitamin support.

Remember to monitor your rat's health regularly as they can be very good at hiding sickness or disease. Watch out for puffy feathers, being inactive, sleeping a lot, not their usual chirpy self. If signs of illness occur contact your local small animal Vet for advice.

