

HEALTH

The most common ailments seen in rats are sneezing and breathing problems. Be sure to use appropriate dust-free bedding in your rats' cage to help prevent these problems occurring. If sneezing and breathing problems persist, seek the attention of a vet.

Rats can get mites and lice, which will be very uncomfortable for your pet. A recommended topical small animal spray will usually deal with these and your pet shop or vet can advise.

Occasionally a rat's teeth will overgrow and may require clipping by a vet. If you notice your rat having difficulty eating, or the teeth look abnormal then seek veterinary advice immediately.

Female rats in particular can develop mammary tumours. The risk of this can be lowered by not overfeeding your rats or allowing them to become overweight.

Rats are very good at hiding signs of illness and can become poorly quickly. If you are at all concerned about your pet's health speak to your vet. It is recommended to find a vet that has experience with rats.

PET CODE OF PRACTICE

Never release any pet (companion animal) into the wild. It is illegal and for most species this will lead to an untimely and possibly lingering death, as they are not native to this country. Any animals or plants that do survive might be harmful to the environment. This includes the need to properly dispose of soiled substrate, so that any seeds, eggs or live food can't escape into the wild.

SHOPPING LIST

- book on rat care
- escape-proof cage
- dust-free floor covering such as shredded cardboard
- soft bedding and hammocks
- food and food dish
- solid exercise wheel
- water bottle and bottle brush
- wooden chew toys
- tubes and other toys
- vitamin drops
- pet-safe disinfectant
- small plastic pet carrier



THE FIVE ANIMAL WELFARE NEEDS

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 means all pet owners have a legal duty of care to their pets. Anyone who is cruel to an animal or is found not to be providing the five animal welfare needs, as listed below, can be fined and sent to prison.

- 1 Environment:** pets should be given the correct housing according to its size, this includes shelter, space to exercise and a secure, comfortable place to rest.
- 2 Diet:** pets should be offered the correct type and volume of food to cover all their nutritional needs alongside access to clean, fresh water.
- 3 Behaviour:** all pets should be allowed to exhibit normal behaviour patterns and should be provided with the facilities to do so.
- 4 Company:** some animals require the company of their own kind, whilst others should be kept on their own.
- 5 Health:** all animals should be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease, and given veterinary treatment if they become sick or injured.

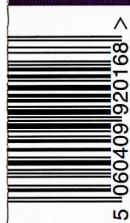


This leaflet is produced by The Pet Charity, a national charity which promotes the joy and benefits of pet ownership.

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These organisations support the aims of The Pet Charity to promote the welfare and responsible keeping of pet animals.



The Pet Charity
www.thepetcharity.org.uk
info@thepetcharity.org.uk
Registered charity no: 1052488

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GUIDE TO CARING FOR RATS

the
pet
charity
For joy, health & companionship



Rats are intelligent and interactive animals that make good family pets. They can become very tame when handled regularly and typically live for around two and a half years.

THE PET CHARITY GUIDE TO CARING FOR RATS

Fancy rats are descendants of the brown rats which originate from Asia. They are social animals so it is strongly recommended they be kept in single-sex pairs or groups. Young rats are often easier to introduce than adults, although it can be possible with adults of the same sex.

CHOOSING YOUR RAT

There are many colours and varieties of fancy rat available. Whichever variety you decide on, your rats should ideally be between 7 – 10 weeks old, and not less than 6 weeks old, before you take them home. Ensure they are friendly and healthy before purchasing them.

A healthy rat:

- should be bright and alert
- should have no signs of discharge from eyes, ears, mouth or nose
- should have a clean anal and genital area
- should have a glossy coat with no bald patches or sores on the skin
- should have no sign of breathing problems
- should move around the cage easily
- should not feel too skinny, bony or overweight

HOUSING

A cage of at least 80 x 60 x 50cm will give your rats adequate space. Rats 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. A dust-free cardboard-based product makes an ideal floor covering. Your rat will also appreciate a choice of sleeping places, such as hammocks, baskets and nest boxes.

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 fortnight. You can also train your rats to use a litter tray. Litter should be paper based.

As rats are indoor pets they should be kept at an even temperature ideally between 16 – 22°C. You should avoid putting the cage in draughts, direct sunlight or in damp or humid conditions. It isn't recommended to keep your pet rats in the bedroom.

Rats are inquisitive and active therefore they should be provided with as much stimulation as possible. A solid exercise wheel and a selection of toys to avoid boredom should be provided.

FOOD AND WATER

Rats are omnivores so they will enjoy a varied diet. A complete rat mix, available from most pet shops, should be the basis of their diet. Scattering your rats' food around the cage, as well as using a bowl is a good form of enrichment. Dry mix should be supplemented with small amounts of vegetables, such as kale and broccoli, and the occasional boiled egg. Small amounts of cooked chicken can also be given, but be careful not to overfeed. Uneaten fresh food should be removed regularly.

Food bowls should be sturdy, gnaw-proof and easily disinfected.

Fresh drinking water should always be available for your rats. It should be provided by a gravity-fed water bottle designed to fit your rats' cage.

DID YOU KNOW?

Citrus fruit is toxic to male rats.



HANDLING

Handling your rats often will help them build a relationship with you. When you first take your pet rats home, allow them 24 hours to get used to their new environment, then allow them to sniff your hands before handling them. This will get them used to your smell. Stroke your rat and be sure he is facing you, pick him up firmly but gently around the middle and then transfer him to your arms. Pet rats love to sit on your shoulder, but care must be taken that they cannot fall. Never pick up your rats by their tail.

Rats will also enjoy 'free range' time in a designated safe area such as a sofa or hallway. Ensure there are no electrical wires, narrow spaces or predators such as cats or dogs. Always supervise your rat during free-range time.

