

PURCHASING YOUR FIRST PET RAT FACT SHEET

Forget what you've heard — rats are surprisingly clean little creatures. With their sharp sense of smell and constant self-grooming, they keep themselves spotless. And yes, they can even be litter trained! Who knew a pet could be this low-maintenance and adorable?

Handy Checklist

Pet rats are intelligent, curious, and social animals that thrive in the right environment. Use this checklist to ensure you've got everything your new furry friend needs to stay healthy and happy.

- Housing:** Choose a secure wire rat cage or a glass tank with a ventilated critter lid to keep your rats safe and contained.
- Enrichment:** Add at least two toys — like ropes, tunnels, or chew blocks — to keep your rats mentally stimulated.
- Bedding:** Provide soft, absorbent bedding to line the cage and keep it clean and cosy.
- Rat House:** A small hideaway or house gives your rat a safe, quiet place to rest.
- Water:** Use a water bottle or heavy ceramic bowl to keep fresh water available at all times.
- Feeding:** Include a sturdy food dish and provide a balanced, species-appropriate rat food.
- Exercise:** An appropriately sized exercise wheel helps keep them physically active.
- Minerals:** A salt wheel can help support mineral intake, especially in growing or breeding rats.
- Health:** Use a suitable wormer as advised, and consider a vitamin supplement for overall well-being.



Rats can be trained to fetch!

Their high intellect makes them fast learners. You can also train them to respond to their name and come when called, just like dogs and cats!





Setting up your cage

Choose a position for your rat cage that is not near any drafts or direct sunlight.

Place a thin layer of bedding across the bottom of the cage.

Position the house in one corner of the cage. Fill the water bowl / bottle and position this in the cage ensuring your rat can easily access it.

Fill your food dish and place this near the water.

Position the toys and exercise wheel so as they can be played with without knocking the food, water or house.

Now introduce your rat to its new home.

Purchasing your rat

Rats are very sociable and enjoy living in pairs.

Decide if you would like male or female rats.

Watch the rats play for a while before choosing yours, this way you can see what kind of personality it has and how active and healthy it is.

If you choose female rats it doesn't really matter how old they are or if they are different ages when you introduce them together.

However if you decide to get male rats, to prevent them from fighting we suggest you purchase them as babies or ones that have been kept together since they were babies.

Always get the same sex unless you plan to breed from them.



Arriving home

Your rat should be given to you in a transport container. Leave your rat in this container until its cage is set up. Once your cage is set up gently place the container in the cage and leave one end opened. This way if your rat is feeling a little nervous it can come out at its own pace when it feels more comfortable.

Rats like to be gently handled. Just gently stroke your rat with one finger until it is used to you. After this, you will be able to pick your rat up and hold it without your rat being afraid.

Feeding your rat

You will need to feed your rat on a daily basis.

It is important to measure out the correct quantities, as rats can easily become very obese.

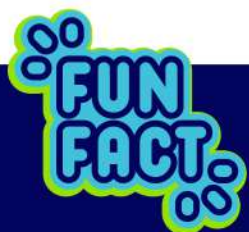
Feeding a commercially formulated rat mix along with a selection of fresh fruit and vegetables. Avoid giving too many seeds, as these are quite fatty, also avoid lettuce, celery and cheese.

Cheese can actually cause constipation and make your rat very smelly; lettuce and celery have a large water content and can cause diarrhea.

Small pieces of apple, carrot, cucumber, zucchini, capsicum, mushrooms, peas, beans, broccoli, silver beet and cauliflower can be given daily.

As a very special treat in moderation you can give your rat a very small taste of peanut butter.

Water should be changed daily unless you use a bottle, then it can be changed every other day.



They groom more than cats – Believe it or not, rats are meticulous cleaners, often grooming themselves and each other throughout the day.





Cage maintenance

The bedding in your rat cage should be changed every three days, more often if you have three or more rats.

When you remove the bedding you should wash the cage, toys and house in disinfectant, always rinse with fresh water and dry.

Then add new bedding to the cage and reposition all bowls, toys and beds.

Now your rat can go back into its home.

Worming

Like cats and dogs, rats need to be wormed every three months.

All you need to do is purchase a small animal wormer and follow the directions. Repeat this every three months.

Vitamin supplements

Rats require a complete and balanced diet to remain healthy. If they are not getting a varied diet, vitamin supplements should be added to their water.

Rats require a lick stone to provide all of their bodies salt requirements. These can be hung in the cage and replaced once finished.

Breeding

Rats can start breeding from the age of 6 weeks, however they should not be bred until they are at least 16 weeks old.

The gestation period is between 21 and 23 days. The average litter size 12. A baby rat is called a pup.

If you are planning to breed rats before you start you will need to be prepared.

You will require a community tank where both the males (bucks) and females (does) are kept.

Once the doe is pregnant she needs to be removed and placed in her own cage. Her pups stay in this cage with her from birth until they are around 27 days old.

The doe then needs to stay in this cage or go into a cage with females only to be rested for a month before going back into the community tank again.

Potentially you will require a cage per doe, a community cage, a cage for young does and a cage for young bucks.

Before breeding ensure that you will have somewhere to sell or home your rat as your population will expand rapidly.

Fit and healthy rats

A healthy rat will be active, have a shiny full coat, firm droppings and clear eyes and nose. If your rat doesn't appear like this or stops eating you should take it to the vet.

A common problem with rats is missing fur. This can be the cause of mites or lice. As a preventative you can treat your rat with mite and lice spray on a monthly basis.

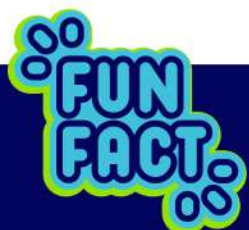
Poor diet and lack of vitamins cause diarrhea and poor condition, this should be looked at for the cause of illness.



Further Information

There are books specifically written on the care and health of rats. These can be a great source of additional information for you.

There are also rat clubs listed online! These clubs' members have a lot of knowledge to share and you can also join in the fun with their activities.



They dream like humans – Studies show rats experience dreams during REM sleep, just like we do.

