MOUSE CARE GUIDE

CAGE

SIZE: 1 cubic foot per 1 - 2 mice (minimum)

MATERIAL: Aquarium tanks and tub/bin cages are ideal as they provide the size, security and depth needed for mice to thrive. Mice do best in deep cages with layers of bedding and tunnels to explore and nest in. Wire cages with bars are unable to hold in bedding very well and bar spacing must be very minimal to avoid escape. Habitrails are not recommended. One Habitrail is way too small for mice and many connected are very difficult to clean.

BEDDING

GOOD
CareFresh
shredded paper
paper towels
Yesterday's News (paper pellets)
fleece

BAD
cedar
pine
corn cob
saw dust
clay cat litter

BEDDING TIP: Use paper pellets to line the bottom of the cage then add high layers of shredded paper or CareFresh for nesting/burrowing. MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends avoiding all wood bedding to avoid respiratory illness.

FURNISHINGS

Decking out your mouse cage with not only the essentials but also an assortment of fun stuff to do is incredibly important for the happiness and well-being of your mice. Mice are quite clever creatures and can get bored easily, so it is ideal to change out the toys and furnishings for them in addition to providing a variety and number of items. Everywhere your mouse goes there should be an activity. The cage should be full of fun stuff to do, places to climb and burrow, things to chew, tunnels and tubes, hides, etc.

ESSENTIALS
water bottle
food dish
shelter (box, igloo, etc)
chew toy (wood, lava)
nesting material for burrowing and tunnel making wheel

FUN STUFF
bits of fabric
ladders
cardboard
old socks
paper towel rolls

Why chew toys? Mice are rodents which means their teeth constantly grow. They require chew toys to gnaw on in order to keep their teeth trim.

Example
The cage on the top is a tub/bin cage. This is a cheaper option but requires a bit of DIY. Below is an aquarium tank. We recommend at least 66 quarts for the tub and at least 20 gallons for the tank. Remember, the more room the better!

Learn how to make a tub/bin cage!
https://hammyhappenings.wordpress.com/diy-hamster-cage-bin-cage/
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**Feeding**

**DIET**

**AMOUNT:** Always keep your mouse's bowl full.

**BRANDS/TYPE:** High quality rat/mouse kibble, pellets or blocks are considered the best choices for staple diets. *Commercial foods with seeds and other mix ins can be problematic as many mice will pick and choose which parts they want to eat and don’t get a balanced diet.*

**TREATS**

- **GOOD**
  - apples
  - bananas
  - bell peppers
  - blueberries
  - broccoli
  - carrots
  - cauliflower
  - Cherries
  - cranberries
  - cucumbers
  - hard boiled eggs
  - scrambled eggs (plain)
  - cooked green beans
  - parsley
  - pasta (cooked or uncooked)
  - peas
  - pumpkins & seeds
  - plain popcorn
  - raspberries
  - rice (cooked or uncooked)
  - sunflower seeds
  - yogurt

- **BAD**
  - apple seeds
  - raw beans
  - walnuts
  - garlic
  - onion
  - any citrus fruit
  - peanuts
  - poppy seeds
  - cabbage
  - rhubarb
  - grapes
  - raisins
  - corn
  - cheese
  - milk
  - fizzy drinks
  - raw meat

**Example**

MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends these high quality mouse/rat food brands:

- **PELLETS, BLOCKS OR KIBBLE**
  - OXBOW REGAL RAT
  - MAZURI RAT AND MOUSE DIET

**OVERWEIGHT MICE:** When giving your mice treats, keep their size in mind. Never give more than 1/4 tablespoon or so. Mice can become easily obese if given too many treats, fed an improper diet (mainly seed mixes) and/or does not get sufficient exercise via a wheel, exercise ball or floor time. Keep an eye on your mouse's physique and if you notice he is getting a bit chubby, change his lifestyle accordingly.
**EXERCISE**

**WHEELS** : Most mice love to run on wheels! This is a great way for them to exercise and keep entertained. Be sure to only use wheels with a solid base (never wire) and of the appropriate size.

**EXERCISE BALLS** : Letting your mice run in an exercise ball is a fun way for your mouse to safely explore your house. Be sure to always closely monitor your mice when they are in their exercise balls to ensure they don’t get stuck or escape.

Although mice are naturally nocturnal, they can easily adapt to your schedule. Mice thrive on routine, so try to stick to one in order to build their trust and keep them active during the times when you would like to interact with them.

Mice are very social animals and love to spend time with humans and other mice. They also enjoy puzzles and problem solving. Here are some fun game ideas to play with your mice:

- **MAKE A MAZE**
- **CHASE** (using a toy)
- **OBSTACLE COURSE**
- **FETCH**
- **FOOD HUNT** (hide food for your mouse to find)
- **TICKLING**

**SOCIAL NEEDS**

**MENTAL STIMULATION** : Mice are incredibly intelligent and personable pets. They need daily time outside of their cage to explore, get some exercise and bond with their humans. **You should set aside a minimum of one hour per day for playtime with your mice.** Younger mice will be more active and playful while older mice are often content to explore for a short time and spend the rest cuddling in your lap. In general, females are more energetic and independent and males are more lazy and snuggly.

**KEY COMPONENTS OF TRAINING**

- trust
- positive reinforcement
- consistency
- repetition
- patience

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Mice are very trainable and can learn tons of fun tricks! They love to please and problem solve.

**BONDED BUDDIES** : Female mice are extremely social creatures and will be much happier if they have at least one other female mouse to live with. Males on the other hand tend to fight with other males, even if they are littermates. Some males can and do live together but always be prepared for the possibility that they may eventually have to live separately.

**FLOOR TIME** : Take your mice out in an area where you can easily catch them such as on your bed or a chair. Let them run around in your hands, lap and arms. Once they are comfortable with you, you can let them run around and play in the designated area. It is recommended to not let your mouse run freely until it is used to you and lets you pick it up easily,
GENERAL INFO

**ANNUAL EXAM**: It is important to take your mouse to the vet for an annual exam to ensure he is in good health. Mice do not require vaccines.

**GENERAL SIGNS OF ILLNESS**

- any behavioral change
- lethargy
- defensive aggression
- disinterested in treats
- changes in eating or drinking
- disinterested in interacting with you
- poor coat quality

**LIFESPAN**: 2 - 3 years

Mice control their temperature through their tails and the soles of their paws. **Try to maintain a temperature of between 65 and 80 degrees F and a humidity of between 30 and 70%**.

COMMON ISSUES

**UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION**

Bacteria (most commonly mycoplasma) or viruses lead to URI (upper respiratory infection) and pneumonia. It is very important to watch for any signs of illness and get your mouse to the vet right away as mice will try to hide illness for as long as they possibly can, meaning by the time you notice any symptoms, they have been ill for a while and will likely need treatment as soon as possible. Signs of URI include sneezing, labored breathing, chattering, sniffling, eye or nose discharge, lethargy, weight loss and lack of appetite.

**SKIN CONDITIONS**

If you mouse is excessively scratching and/or you notice sores on your its skin, particularly around the shoulders, neck and ears, your pet may have mites. Your vet will do a skin scraping to look for mites under the microscope. Mites are treated easily with a prescribed pesticide such as Ivermectin. If no mites are found, your mouse may have allergies to bedding, food or detergent. Other causes of rashes and skin conditions are ringworm and bacterial infections. Clean patches of hair loss could be from barbering (see behavior section.) Your vet should be able to determine the cause of your mouse’s problem and treat accordingly.

**REPRODUCTION**: Mice become sexually mature and are able to reproduce at 50 days of age. It is possible to spay and neuter mice but most people choose to keep them intact and house them with the same sex instead, as surgery on such small animals is extremely risky, particularly a complex surgery such as a spay.

**TUMORS**

Unfortunately mice are prone to tumors as they age, especially females. Tumors in mice are usually benign and can be surgically removed. Your vet will be able to tell you if this is possible. If your mouse is over 2 years old, surgery may not be the best option as surgery and anesthetic can be rough on older mice and the risk to your mouse starts to increase. If you don't opt for removal, mice can live with benign tumors for several months, however it does eventually take its toll on your mouse as the tumor grows. If your mouse is no longer able to move around on its own due to a tumor or is no longer interested in eating or drinking and surgery is not an option, it may be time to consider humane euthanasia.
**VOCALIZATION**

**SQUEAKING**: When playing, disturbed, surprised or picked up, some mice will squeak. This is usually a protest to what is happening or a cry in pain.

**TEETH CHATTERING/GRINDING**: This is called bruxing and it means your mouse is happy! This essentially a mousie purr. You may also see your mouse's eyes boggle.

**PEEPING**: A happy sound sometimes heard when grooming.

**SINGING**: Recent studies have shown that male mice actually sing like songbirds to woo females - we just can't hear them due to the high pitch! Mice do lots of communicating with each other vocally in pitches that we humans cannot detect.

**HOPPING**: Mice hop, bounce, leap and run around when they are happy and having fun. This is also called popcornning.

**LICKING**: Mice lick themselves and each other to groom. If your mouse licks you, it means you are loved!

**TAIL WAGGING**: If you see your mouse's tail wagging back and forth like a dog, it means it is nervous, stressed or afraid. The wagging tail is a warning that the mouse will attack.

**BARBERING**: When mice are stressed they may begin to overgroom causing hair loss and occasionally sores.

**CHASING**: Mice are quite social, playful creatures and will often chase each other around for fun, especially younger mice. If you notice your mice are chasing and making lots of noise and contact, this could mean they are squabbling and may need to be separated.

**EXCESSIVE GROOMING**: When mice are stressed or nervous they tend to groom themselves as a self soothing behavior. If overstressed for too long, some mice will begin to barber (see above.)

**INCONTINENCE**: Mice communicate with each other largely by scent, including using urine and feces. It is debated amongst mouse fanciers whether or not mice can be potty trained, but most people believe they cannot, primarily due to the communication factor. Luckily, mice are very small so cleanup is easy!
TRUST: It is best to let your mice come to you before reaching in to pick them up as this develops trust. Talk to your mouse and let it sniff your hand before you pick it up to announce that you are coming. Mice have very poor eyesight and this will help prevent startling them. A great way to earn your mouse's trust is to place a treat in the palm of your hand and just rest your hand flat, palm up on the floor of cage without moving. Leave it there for as long as you are able. Eventually, your mouse will be curious and comfortable enough to come up and sniff you, then climb into your hand to take the treat. In time you will be able to place your hand in there and have your mouse come up to you without a treat. Once your mouse is totally comfortable being in your hand you can take him out of the cage and play with him.

BATHING: Mice are fastidiously clean animals and spend a large part of their time grooming. You should never bathe your mouse. Older mice may need some help grooming, especially if they don't have cagemates. If so, use a warm damp cloth to clean your mouse. Make sure you dry them well so they don't get cold.

DENTAL CARE: You do not need to brush your mouse's teeth but you must provide plenty of chew toys so your mouse can wear down its teeth naturally. Check your mouse's teeth regularly to be sure they are not overgrown or misaligned.

NAILS: Generally, mice do not need their nails trimmed and will wear down their claws naturally, especially if you provide your pet with a brick or something similar to run on. It is not recommended that you cut your mouse's nails as their toes are very tiny and the risk of cutting off a toe is high.

SMELL: Male mice are notorious for their strong, musky odor, which they use to attract females. Unfortunately, there is not a way to really prevent this so finding the right odor control method is key. Check out the Rat and Mouse Club of America’s page for tips: http://www.rmca.org/Articles/odor.htm. Never use strong sprays or perfumes around your pets or in their habitat.