CAGE

SIZE: 2 cubic feet per rat (minimum)

MATERIAL: Wire cages are ideal as they provide the ventilation, size and height needed for rats to thrive. Rats do best in taller cages rather than wider cages as they love to climb. Bar spacing should be 1/2” or less for baby or small rats and 1” or less for adult rats. Remember, always cover the wire shelf floors of cages with fleece or something similar to help prevent injury and bumblefoot.

Example
The cage on the left is suitable for 1-3 rats. It is tall and has several levels. Fleece should be used to cover the shelves. The cage on the right is suitable for up to 9 rats. Its levels are solid so fleece lining is optional. Remember, the more room the better!

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: Sometimes bedding that works for one rat will not work for another, some rats have allergies to certain beddings. MN Pocket Pet Rescue recommends avoiding all wood based beddings due to the general sensitivity of rats.

FURNISHINGS

Decking out your rat 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 rats. Rats are incredibly smart 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.

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

ESSENTIALS
- water bottle
- food dish
- shelter (box, igloo, etc)
- hammocks
- chew toy (wood, lava)

FUN STUFF
- tunnels
- bird toys
- treat balls
- lava landings
- yucca
- pet beds
- ladders
- cardboard

Example
The cage on the left is suitable for 1-3 rats. It is tall and has several levels. Fleece should be used to cover the shelves. The cage on the right is suitable for up to 9 rats. Its levels are solid so fleece lining is optional. Remember, the more room the better!

This website is a great resource to check that your cage is the appropriate size.

RAT CAGE CALCULATOR WEBSITE
http://www.rattycorner.com/odds/calc.shtml
**DIET**

**AMOUNT:** Always keep your rats’ bowl full.

**BRANDS/TYPE:** High quality rat 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 rats will pick and choose which parts they want to eat and don’t get a balanced diet.*

**GOOD**
- apples
- apricots
- ripe bananas
- bell peppers
- blueberries
- boysenberries
- broccoli
- cooked butternut squash
- carrots
- cauliflower
- cranberries
- cucumbers
- hard boiled eggs
- grapes
- cooked green beans
- kale
- kiwi
- cooked mushrooms
- peaches (no pit)
- plums (no pit)
- pomegranates
- pears
- papaya
- peas
- pumpkins & seeds
- plain popcorn
- raspberries
- romaine lettuce
- yogurt

**BAD**
- apple seeds
- raw artichokes
- green bananas
- blue cheese
- raw brussel sprouts
- licorice
- mango*
- raw onion
- oranges*
- orange juice*
- raw peanuts (roasted ok)
- poppy seeds
- green potato skin/eyes
- red cabbage
- rhubarb
- raw sweet potatoes

*Male rats have a protein in their kidney that no other rodent has called alpha2u-globulin. When a male rat has too much d-limonene, it causes the protein in the kidneys to build up which causes tumors (hyaline droplet nephropathy). Females do not have this protein and therefore studies have shown that d-limonene does not have the same affect on them. D-Limonene is a naturally occurring substance found mainly in citrus oils and is used as a flavor and fragrance additive in food, cleaning products, even shampoo. The substance can also be found in mangoes, another seemingly innocently healthy fruit. Caution should be exercised when offering table scraps with black pepper or nutmeg because they too have significant amounts of d-limonene.

- Shawna Laufer
  “The Rat Whisperer”
  http://www.ratwhisperer.net

**Example**

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

- OXBOW REGAL RAT
- MAZURI RAT AND MOUSE DIET

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**TREATS**
RAT CARE GUIDE
Exercise & Social Needs

EXERCISE

WHEELS: Some rats will use a wheel and others will not. Be sure to only use wheels with a solid base (never wire) and of the appropriate size.

RAT PROOFING: All rats are different but it’s better to be safe than sorry. When having outside playtime be sure to secure the area so your rats can’t escape the room. Always hide or cover all cords and outlets. Make sure your rats can’t get into small spaces such as under the fridge or in couch cushions. Use an exercise pen whenever possible. If you have other pets, secure them in another room or a crate.

Although rats are naturally nocturnal, they can easily adapt to your schedule. Rats 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.

Rats are very social animals and love to spend time with humans and other rats. Here are some fun game ideas to play with your rats:

- WRESTLING (using your hand)
- CHASE (using a toy)
- HIDE & SEEK
- FOOD HUNT (hide food for your rat to find)
- TICKLING
- FETCH

SOCIAL NEEDS

MENTAL STIMULATION: Rats 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 rats. Younger rats will be more active and playful while older rats 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?
Rats are very trainable and can learn tons of fun tricks! They love to please and problem solve.

LEARN HOW TO TRAIN YOUR RAT
http://theagilerat.com/?id=36

BONDED BUDDIES: Pet rats are very social and will be happiest when living with other rats. It is strongly recommended to adopt a minimum of two rats at a time. Rats should be kept only with other rats of the same sex.
RAT CARE GUIDE

Health

GENERAL INFO

**ANNUAL EXAM**: It is important to take your rat to the vet for an annual exam to ensure your rat is in good health. Rats 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

**REPRODUCTION**: Rats become sexually mature and are able to reproduce at 4 weeks of age. It is possible to spay and neuter rats but most people choose to keep them intact and house them with the same gender instead, as surgery on small animals is always risky, particularly a complex surgery such as a spay. Talk to your vet to see what option is right for you and your rats.

**UPPER RESPIRATORY INFECTION**

Most rats carry mycoplasma which is the organism that most often leads to URI (upper respiratory infection) and pneumonia. Some rats can carry this without ever showing symptoms while others will suffer from infections on and off throughout their lives, most often brought on by stress. It is very important to watch for any signs of illness and get your rat to the vet right away as rats 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. **Please see our sheet on URIs for more information.**

**TUMORS**

Unfortunately rats are prone to tumors as they age, especially females. Tumors in rats are usually benign and can be surgically removed. Your vet will be able to tell you if this is possible. If your rat is over 2 years old, surgery may not be the best option as surgery and anesthetic can be rough on older rats and the risk to your rat starts to increase. If you don't opt for removal, rats can live with benign tumors for several months, however it does eventually take its toll on your rat as the tumor grows. If your rat 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.

Abscesses are also common in rats, and can be treated with a round of antibiotics and/or lancing the abscess.

**MITES**

If you rat is excessively scratching and/or you notice sores on your rat's skin, particularly around the shoulders, neck and ears, your rat 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 rat may have allergies to bedding, food or detergent.
VOCALIZATION

SQUEAKING: When playing, disturbed, surprised or picked up, some rats 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 rat is happy! This essentially a rattle purr. You may also see your rat's eyes boggle.

HISsing: When a rat is angry or defensive it will puff up and hiss. This is a warning and the rat may bite.

GRUNTinG: Occasionally rats will grunt when excited.

PEEPing: A happy sound sometimes heard when grooming.

BODY LANGUAGE

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

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

TAIL WAGGING: Rats use their tails for balance but if you see your rat's tail wagging back and forth like a dog, it usually means it is nervous, stressed or afraid. A few rats wag their tails when happy; you can tell what your rat means based on context.

HEAD SWAYING: Rats have very poor eyesight, especially if they have red or pink eyes. They will sway their heads back and forth in order to create better depth perception.

EYE BOGGLING: Often, when a rat is bruxing, you will notice his eyes boggling. This happens from the rat grinding his teeth when he is happy.

SOUNDS OF RESPIRATORY ILLNESS

CHIRPING
CLICKING
SNEEZING
WHISTLING
GURGLING

If your rat is making any of these sounds, take it to the vet as soon as possible.

SHOVING: If a rat pushes you or another rat with its front paws this means, “Stop it!” or “Go away!”

HELICoPTER TAIL: As mentioned before, rats use their tails for balance. Sometimes when a rat is picked up it will swing its tail around like a helicopter in order to try and steady itself. If your rat does this, you are not holding it correctly and should support your rat's hind end.

FREezING: A rat will stop suddenly and freeze if startled or frightened.

URINE TRAILS: Very dominant or outgoing rats, particularly males, will sometimes leave droplets of urine behind them. This is how they mark their territory. Unfortunately, this is just something that rats do. This is different than relieving the bladder which would leave a large wet spot - rats CAN be taught not to do this.
SAFE HANDLING

THROUGH THE BARS: Never feed your rat or stick your fingers through the cage bars. Doing so encourages rats to bite at fingers both in and out of the cage. Always offer treats with an open palm when possible.

TRUST: It is ideal to let your rats come to you before reaching in to pick them up as this develops trust. Talk to your rat and let it sniff your hand before you pick it up to announce that you are coming. Rats have very poor eyesight and this will help prevent startling them.

GROOMING

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

BATHING: Rats are fastidiously clean animals and spend up to 30% of their time grooming themselves. Therefore, you should rarely, if ever, need to bathe your rat. If circumstances arise that you must, be sure to use kitten shampoo and never human shampoo, as the latter can irritate a rat’s skin.

PICKING UP YOUR RAT: Always use two hands when picking up your rat. One hand should support the rump while the other supports the chest. Once your rat is comfortable being picked up and handled, you can let it run around you. Many rats enjoy riding on shoulders and can be trained to stay there. Never pick your rat up by the tail; this is very dangerous for the rat.

Generally, rats do not need their nails trimmed and will wear down their claws naturally, especially if you provide your pet with a Lava Ledge or something similar. As rats age they sometimes get a bit lazy and allow their nails to grow so you may need to step in and help them out.

If your rat does need its nails trimmed, be sure to only clip the clear part of the nail, avoiding the pink vein (quick.) Use human nail clippers and try to cover up the toe with your fingers so that only the nail is exposed. If you accidentally cut the quick, dip your rat’s foot in cornflour or styptic powder.

Nail trims can be scary for a rat so be sure to give breaks and lots of treats!