



CARING FOR MICE AND RATS

ABOUT MICE AND RATS

Mice and rats are popular pets because of their small size and minimal demands for space and attention. They are easy to care for, clean, quiet, and can be easily trained. They make good first pets for children, but can be timid at first, so take the time to build a bond with them. The average life span of mice and rats is around 24-36 months.

HOUSING

There is a wide variety of housing available for mice and rats. Specially designed wire or plastic cages are the most common. Mice and rats can squeeze through small spaces, so ensure the wire mesh or bar spacing is small enough that they cannot escape. Since they like to explore and exercise, purchase the largest enclosure you can. Cages with multiple levels provide additional space for exercise. The floor of the cage should be solid. Make sure to place your new pet's cage in a safe place, out of the way of other pets that may cause harm to your mice or rats. **Mice and rats should not be housed together in the same enclosure.**

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED?

1. **Enrichment devices.** Provide your pet with exercise wheels, hanging and rolling toys, ledge, ramps, and items to climb on that are specifically designed for rodents. Privacy should be offered by including a hideaway or tubes for hiding and resting. An appropriately sized exercise ball or small animal playpen can provide your furry friend an outlet for their energy and new places to explore.
2. **Dental.** Since mice and rats have incisors that continuously grow throughout their lives, it is important to provide them constant access to chew toys, including wood sticks and mineral chews, to help keep their teeth from growing too long, causing injury.
3. **Bedding.** Providing an appropriate, comfortable, and hygienic environment for your new pet is important. Purchase bedding materials such as wood shavings, or paper-based materials which are absorbent, clean, dust-free, and non-toxic. Avoid cedar chips because the oil is harmful to mice and rats.
4. **Accessories.** Ceramic or hard plastic food bowls and ball-tipped sipper bottles are recommended. Sipper bottles are preferred because they can avoid water spillage or water contamination from your pet's feces.

BRINGING YOUR MICE AND RATS HOME

Rats and mice are social animals and should be kept in same-gender pairs or groups. Both mice and rats can have multiple litters per year, so maintain separate colonies by gender to avoid unintentional breeding. Males can be aggressive with each other, and often emit a musty odor. Avoid overcrowding and do not mix new arrivals with established colonies to prevent the possibility of fighting.

CARE

Change your pets bedding frequently to prevent odor and the accumulation of ammonia fumes, which can irritate their airways.

All food dishes, and water bottles should be cleaned regularly and disinfected monthly when you thoroughly clean their entire habitat with a non-toxic pet-safe habitat cleaner.

Mice and rats are nocturnal, and therefore play, forage, and feed in the evening. It is important that you provide your pets with approximately 12 hours of light every day.

Mice and rats are comfortable at the same temperature as humans, between 70-75 degrees Fahrenheit. Avoid temperature fluctuations and maintain the ambient temperature range of 65-85 Fahrenheit.

Observe the condition of your mice and rats daily. Any deviation from a normal pattern may be an early indicator of a health condition that requires attention.

The following signs indicate illness:

- Poor eater or non-eater
- Labored breathing
- Dirty tail
- Abnormal urine output
- Hunched or arched back
- Dirty or rough hair coat
- Diarrhea
- Weight loss
- Eye, ear, or nose discharge
- Lumps, bumps
- Walking stiffly

It is smart to arrange a visit to the vet on your way home from picking up your new pet. The vet will check and make sure your pet is healthy and can answer any other questions you might have.

DIET

Purchase food and treats specifically formulated for rats and mice and follow the feeding instructions. A small number of fruits and vegetables can be added for variation, but do not feed your mice or rats other human food or snacks. Fresh, clean de-chlorinated water should be provided daily.

If your pet only eats selected items from a mixed see-based diet, it may be missing out on vital nutrients. This is called selective feeding, and you should change their food to a lab block diet that will provide all of the ingredients they need for a healthy diet.

HANDLING

Proper handling of your pet is important, and there are basic procedures to follow to avoid accidental injuries.

Mice. Talk to your mouse in a soft voice and offer treats to earn his trust. Mice can be picked up by cupping your hands around them to prevent them from jumping and using your thumb to gently pet them. Mice may also be picked up by the base of their tail, but you need to provide support to their body by placing your other hand under

their feet. If your mouse starts to struggle or spin, it is best to place him back into his enclosure immediately. This will prevent the skin from stripping off the tail. If your mouse is not receptive to being picked up, allow him to walk into a container such as a plastic tube or hiding place. Then gently lift it out of the enclosure and coax him out with a treat.

Rats. Offering your rat treats from your hand while speaking softly to them will help develop a bond that makes them feel comfortable being held. Gently grasp your rat from behind, wrapping your hand around them without squeezing and use your other hand to support its weight while slowly lifting it up. Never lift your rat by their tail as it can cause a serious de-gloving injury. If your rat is not receptive to being picked up, scoop him up with a container such as a hideaway.

AVOIDING HUMAN ILLNESS

Mice and rats may carry diseases that can be transmitted to humans, including lymphocytic choriomeningitis virus (LCMV) and rat bite fever (RBF). The simple precautions below can help prevent the risk of infection.

- Closely supervise children and make sure they wash their hands with soap and water after handling small animals, their habitats or anything in their habitats.
- As cute and cuddly as they are, do not kiss small animals. Illnesses are sometimes spread this way.
- Never use food-preparation areas to clean small animal habitats or anything in their habitats. If you clean the habitat in the bathroom, disinfect the area completely afterwards.
- Clean the habitat, food, and water bowls in a well-ventilated area.

Children younger than 5 years old, people with weakened immune systems, and people 65 years of age and older are more likely to get diseases spread between animals and people (also known as zoonotic diseases); contact your health care provider for more information.

This information is designed as a basic guide. There are several books and online resources available which provide in-depth information on mice and rats, and their care. Contact your veterinarian for additional information.