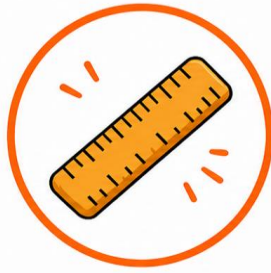


# RAT CARE GUIDE



## Scientific Name

*Rattus norvegicus*



## Adult Size

Varies by sex



## Lifespan

Usually 2–3 years



## Social

Best in compatible pairs or groups

## Housing

Rats need a spacious, secure and well-ventilated enclosure with plenty of room to climb, explore, forage and rest. A multi-level wire cage is generally suitable, provided it includes comfortable solid surfaces where rats can rest.

Although rats enjoy climbing on cage bars and wire frames, they should not be required to stand or walk on wire flooring for long periods, as this may contribute to foot injuries and sores. You can provide flat areas within your cage by using suitable liners, play mats or foraging mats to create comfortable resting areas.

Choose bar spacing that prevents escapes and provide several hides, hammocks, tunnels and nesting areas. Use low-dust bedding and keep the enclosure indoors, away from direct sunlight, smoke, strong scents and draughts.

## Companionship

Rats are highly social animals and should live with at least one compatible rat. Same-sex pairs or groups are often the simplest option for preventing unwanted breeding. Introduce unfamiliar rats gradually and supervise them while their relationship develops. Human attention is valuable, but it does not replace the comfort, communication and play provided by another rat.

## Handling

Allow new rats time to settle, then build trust with calm voices and small food rewards. Scoop a rat up, supporting the chest and hindquarters, and keep them close to your body. Never lift or carry a rat by the end of the tail. Supervise children closely and handle rats near the floor or another safe surface until everyone is confident.

## Diet

Rats are omnivores and need a balanced diet formulated specifically for their life stage. Use a high-quality complete rat pellet as the foundation of the diet. Offer small servings of suitable vegetables regularly, with fruit, higher-fat seeds and food mixes reserved for occasional treats. Introduce new foods gradually and adjust portions to maintain a healthy body condition.

### Fresh Vegetables and Treats Guide (5% of total diet)

| Feed Regularly        | Offer 1-2 Times Per Week   | Avoid Feeding |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|---------------|
| Asian Greens          | Apple or Carrot            | Bread         |
| Rocket                | Boiled Egg                 | Potato        |
| Broccoli              | Strawberry                 | Garlic        |
| Mint                  | Pumpkin or Sunflower Seeds | Chocolate     |
| Spinach               | Capsicum                   | Onion         |
| Cauliflower           | Commercial Treats          | Avocado       |
| Organic Flower Leaves | Corn                       | Lactose       |

## Cleaning and Litter Training

Remove spoiled fresh food and heavily soiled bedding each day. Clean litter trays, shelves, bowls, bottles and fabric items regularly, and complete a more thorough enclosure clean as required. Use pet-safe cleaning products, such as F10, following the manufacturer's directions. Rinse thoroughly where required and allow all surfaces to dry. Good ventilation and low-dust bedding are particularly important for respiratory health.

### Encouraging litter tray use

- Place a low-sided litter tray in the corner your rats already use most often.
- Fill it with an unscented, low-dust and non-clumping litter that is different from their regular bedding.
- Move stray droppings and a small amount of soiled bedding into the tray to provide a familiar scent cue.
- Return misplaced droppings to the tray consistently during training.
- Provide additional trays on different levels or in frequently used areas of larger enclosures.
- Reward successful tray use with praise or a small, healthy treat.
- Clean the tray regularly, but retain a small scent cue while your rats are learning.
- Be patient and never punish accidents. Rats often learn where to leave droppings more reliably than where to urinate, and some scent-marking is normal.

## **Fresh Water**

Fresh, clean water must be available at all times. A sipper bottle helps keep water clean, while a heavy, tip-resistant dish provides a second source. Check bottles every day for blockages or leaks, refresh bowls regularly and provide more than one drinking point when housing a group.

## **Enrichment**

Rats are intelligent, curious and athletic. Provide opportunities to climb, burrow, balance, chew, shred, nest and forage. Use hammocks, tunnels, hanging and rolling toys, paper nesting material and food puzzles, rotating items regularly. If using an exercise wheel, choose a large, solid-surface design that allows the rat's back and tail to remain comfortably aligned. Always supervise its use.

## **Quick Reminder**

Rats need compatible rat companionship, a spacious enriched enclosure and daily opportunities to explore. Complete rat pellets should form the nutritional foundation, with suitable fresh foods offered in modest amounts. Check food, water and each rat's behaviour every day, and contact a rat-experienced veterinarian early if anything changes.