

Mice

Just like rats, mice don't have the best reputation. Filthy, gross, vermin – you name it, they've been called it! For many people, "companion" is definitely not the first word that comes to mind when they think about mice.

Yet, when you take a closer look, you'll find that mice are **amazing**, even **affectionate** animals. (And for those of you who are already huge mouse fans, this is old news!)



PHOTO: EMILIA STASIAK

Mice have had a close relationship with people for a long time. Our towns and cities draw them in, providing a constant supply of food and plenty of shelter. So as we moved around the globe, mice followed – and multiplied. In fact, mice are probably more widespread than any other mammal on earth, apart from humans!

What began as a relationship of dependence, over time became one of companionship. Fascinated by their **curiosity**, **intelligence** and **resourcefulness**, people began to keep tame mice. Eventually, from their wild mouse cousins, a range of friendly, domesticated mice emerged – today's pet mice.

Mice make excellent companions. They are **smart** and **gentle**, not to mention **entertaining** to watch and hang out with. They each have their own unique personality and are fun to get to know.

So give mice a chance! They might just surprise you.



Can you tell the difference?

They may share a similar history, but mice and rats are not the same. Rats are larger and have thicker tails, while mice have pointier faces and more delicate hind feet. They also behave differently as pets. Rats typically require more attention and tend to enjoy interacting with people more than mice do.

BOTH PHOTOS:
MARINA MASLENNIKOVA



Make your house a home for a mouse

Mice are curious and energetic pets, requiring a patient, attentive guardian. Here are just some of the care and welfare needs of mice. The pet care section of the BC SPCA website – spca.bc.ca – has more detailed mouse care information.



Mousemeals

Being omnivores, mice eat both plant and animal products. Feed your mice a staple diet of rodent food (called rodent or lab block). Rodent block is a complete, balanced diet and should be available to them all the time. Provide a small amount of vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds every day, too. Mice crave variety! Be sure to remove any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make them sick.



Handle with care

Mice move quickly and can be tricky to handle. You can pick up your mice by putting cupped hands near them and letting them crawl into your hands. Be careful not to squeeze! Hold your mice while sitting on the floor. Not all mice enjoy being held and they may try to leap from your hands.



Snack attack

Mice love treats! Foods such as unsweetened cereals, plain popcorn and cooked pasta make great snacks. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with fat, unhealthy mice.



My, what big teeth you have!

To help wear down their ever-growing front teeth, provide your mice with chewing items such as cardboard, Timothy hay, wooden toys and apple or aspen branches. Make sure the branches come from trees that haven't been treated with any chemicals.



Mouse house

Mice are active animals requiring a large habitat. The more space, the better! Mice like to burrow so a deep enclosure with a solid bottom is best. A 20 gallon aquarium with a wire mesh lid works well for a pair or trio of mice. Aquariums are secure and can easily be filled with burrowing material.

Drink up!

Mice need water available to them all the time. Fill your mice's sipper bottle with clean, fresh water every day. Once a week, clean the bottle using soap and water. Avoid water dishes. Mice tend to bury them as they dig, creating a soggy mess.



PHOTO: CHELSEY PLATER

Clean and dark

Clean the cage several times a week to keep your mice healthy. Ammonia from urine can irritate their lungs and lead to illness. Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as loud noises and bright lights. Mice like darkness!

What's that smell?

Compared to female mice, male mice have a strong, musky odour. The reason? Males scent mark their environment with urine. You can reduce (but not eliminate) the smell by cleaning your mice's cage regularly. Keep in mind, though, the more you clean their enclosure, the more they will scent mark - making the smell even stronger! Also, cleaning too often can be stressful on mice. The key is to find a balance between a little odour and a healthy environment for your mice.



Social life

Ideally, mice should not be kept alone. Two or more can live together provided they are the same sex and have a large habitat. For all those hours people are at work or school (or asleep), think how happy your mouse will be having a mouse friend! They'll eat,

play and sleep together, and groom each other. Females tend to be more sociable than males. Male mice are prone to fighting and may need to be housed by themselves.

To help prevent squabbles, males should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they are very young. Even then, they may still fight once they reach sexual maturity.



Meticulous mice

Mice are fantastic groomers. They spend lots of time each day carefully cleaning themselves - and each other - all over.



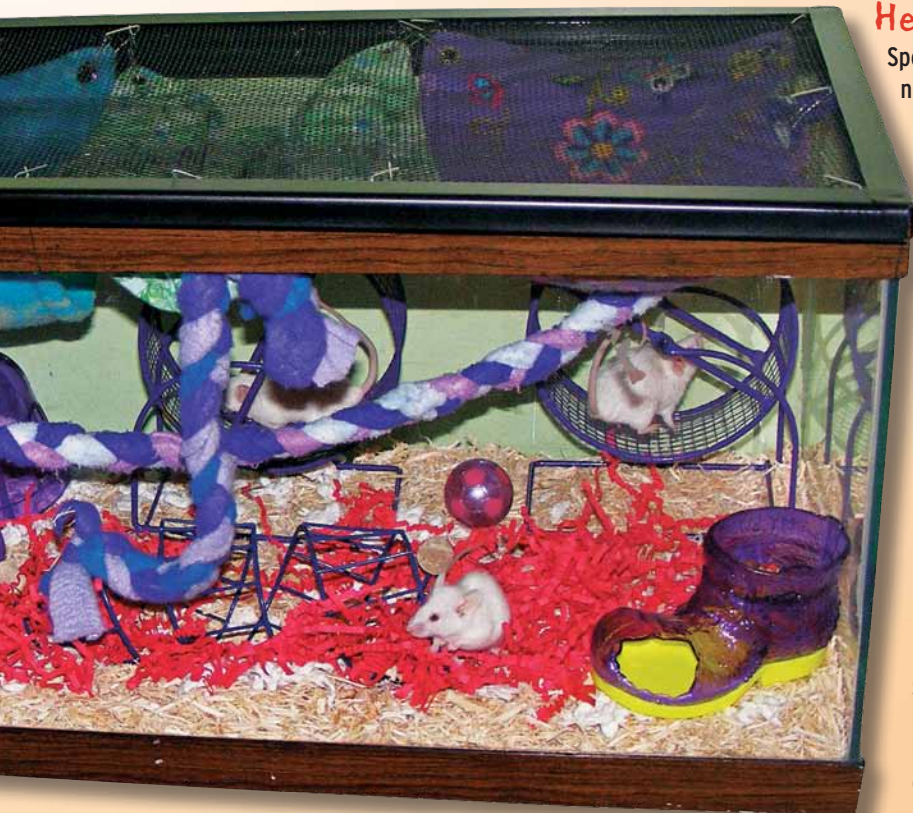
Millions of mice

Never keep male and female mice together, even for a short period. Mice multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 10 litters in just one year, with anywhere from three to 12 young per litter.



Working out

Mice require daily exercise and will happily explore a playpen made just for them. A wading pool or a bathtub (drain closed!) lined with a towel works well. Fill with safe objects to climb on, over and through to keep your mice busy and interested. Paper bags, cereal boxes, paper cups, toilet paper rolls and untreated wood are good choices. Always supervise playtime.



Healthy, happy rodents

Spending time with your mice will show you how they normally look and behave. When you notice something unusual - like breathing problems or loss of appetite - you'll know to take them to the veterinarian right away! Mice usually live for one to three years.

Interior decorating

Adding small houses, ropes, hanging toys, ramps, hammocks, ladders, tunnels, tubes and a solid (not slatted) exercise wheel provides stimulation and places to climb, hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your mice's cage interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material - like toilet paper - for your mice to gather.

A comfy home

For bedding, use wood shavings such as aspen, shredded paper or CareFRESH® (bedding made from recycled paper). Do not use cedar or pine shavings because they can cause health problems. Provide a deep layer of bedding to allow your mice to burrow.

The eyes have it

Mouse eyes are extremely sensitive to light. Primarily nocturnal, mice evolved the ability to see in near total darkness. Bright household lights and direct sunlight can cause eye damage, so keep your mice's enclosure in a dimly lit area.

The nose knows

Mice have a highly developed sense of smell. They use scent to communicate, find food and even detect predators. Avoid using strong-smelling household cleaners, air fresheners and scented bedding materials. Keep other pets away from your mice. The scent of potential predators like cats and dogs may upset them.

Taste test

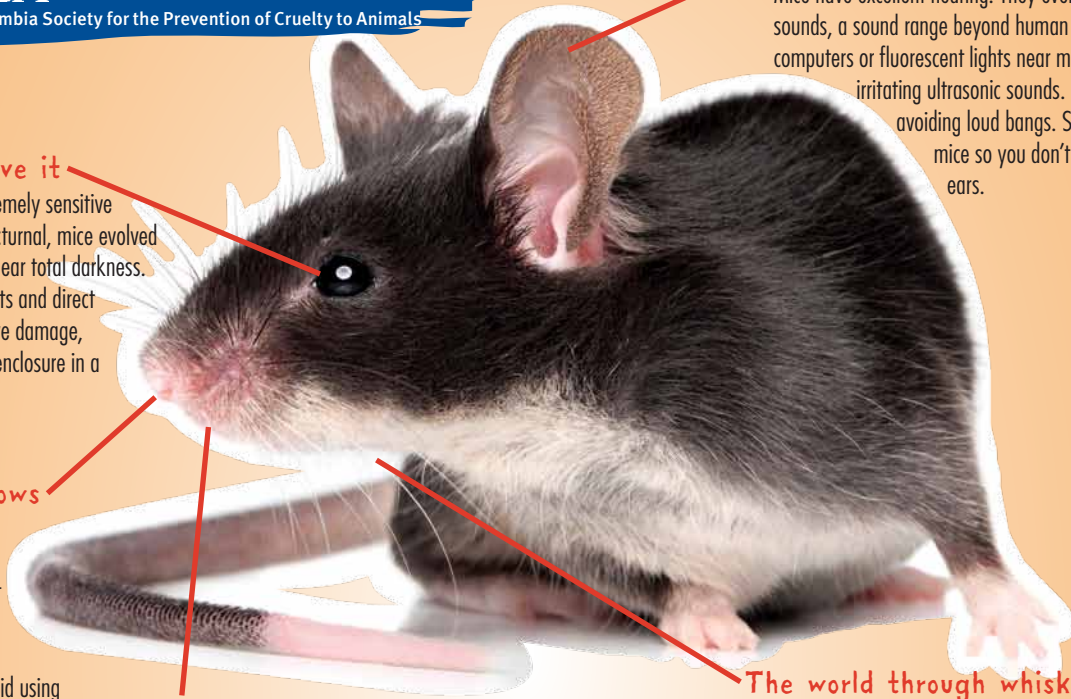
Mice have a sense of taste similar to our own. Just as we like a variety of foods, so do mice! And, like us, mice do not always want what's best for them. They may pick out their favourite foods and leave the rest. By waiting to top up their food dish, your mice will be encouraged to eat a more balanced and healthy diet.

Do you hear what I hear?

Mice have excellent hearing. They even hear ultrasonic sounds, a sound range beyond human hearing. Avoid using computers or fluorescent lights near mice as both make irritating ultrasonic sounds. Clean cages quietly, avoiding loud bangs. Speak softly to your mice so you don't hurt their sensitive ears.

The world through whiskers

Mice use their sensitive whiskers to create a detailed picture of their surroundings. When moving, mice like to remain in contact with a solid surface such as a wall – a special behaviour called "thigmotaxis" [thig-muh-tax-iss]. Being a prey species, they avoid open areas so add lots of hiding places in their habitat. Their whiskers will help them navigate the twists and turns with ease.

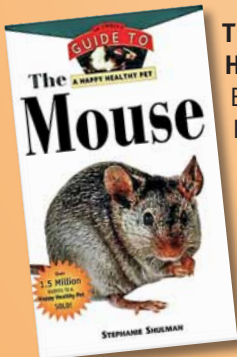


Thinking like a mouse

Knowing how mice perceive the world can help you be the best guardian.
The trick is to think like a mouse!

Mouse musings

This booklet provides basic care information. Please visit spca.bc.ca/animalcare for more detailed mouse care information. You can also scurry on over to these other great mouse resources:



The Mouse: An Owner's Guide to a Happy Healthy Pet

By Stephanie Shulman
Published by Howell Book House

The Fun Mouse

thefunmouse.com

Rat and Mouse Club of America

rmca.org

The mouse guardian pledge

As their guardian, you are responsible for your mice's health and well-being. You should make sure:

1. They never go hungry or thirsty;
2. They are taken to the vet when they are sick or injured;
3. They are not afraid all the time;
4. They are comfortable in their surroundings;
5. They are free to behave like mice!

For more information on providing these "Five Freedoms," check out spca.bc.ca/animalcare.