

CARING FOR YOUR RAT

FOOD & WATER

FOOD

Chow down

Being omnivores, rats eat both plant and animal foods. Feed yours a staple diet of pelleted food made for rats. Pellets are a complete, balanced diet and should be available to them all the time.



Provide a small amount of vegetables, greens and fruits every day, too. Rats crave variety! Be sure to remove any uneaten fresh food the next day so it doesn't spoil and make them sick. Rats hoard their food, so be sure to look for hidden stashes too.



Snack time

Rats love treats! Foods such as scrambled egg, plain popcorn, seeds and nuts make great snacks. Just don't feed too many or you'll end up with an overweight rat.

WHAT ABOUT MIXES?

Some diets sold for rats contain a mix of foods like seeds, dried fruits and corn. The problem with these diets is that rats can pick and choose what they like, which means they won't get all the nutrients they need, even if the diet is advertised as "complete."



Rats have continuously growing front teeth. Because of this, they must gnaw on abrasive foods and materials to help them wear their teeth down. It's really important to follow a proper diet and give them things to chew!



WATER

Rats need water available to them all the time. Fill your rats' sipper bottle or heavy ceramic dish with clean, fresh water every day. Use soap and water to clean them out – once a week for bottles and daily for dishes. Rinse well before refilling.

HANDLING

Handle with care

Rats love attention, but they must be handled gently and carefully. Always pick up your rats with two hands: one hand under their hind end and the other around their chest.



Hands off tails!

Rats should never be picked up by their tail. It's uncomfortable and stressful for them.



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CARING FOR YOUR RAT

HOME ENVIRONMENT



Rats are active animals requiring a large habitat. The more space, the better!

Your rats' living space should include:

- A variety of places to rest and hang out
- Areas for your rats to hide
- Opportunities to dig, chew, climb and explore

HABITAT OPTIONS

Rats like to climb so a tall enclosure with multiple levels is best. A cage measuring three feet long by two feet wide by four feet high (pictured here) works well for a pair or small group of rats. Be sure the bar spacing is no larger than half an inch apart for young rats and an inch apart for adult rats to prevent escape.

Habitat bottoms should be solid, not mesh or wire, which can hurt rat feet. Wire shelves should be covered to prevent injuries, too.

Bedding made from recycled paper or fleece fabric works well for rats. Don't use cedar or pine shavings because they can cause health problems. Clean the cage several times a week to keep your rats healthy. Ammonia from urine can irritate their lungs and lead to illness.

WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO PUT YOUR RATS' HOME?

Keep the cage in an area protected from cold drafts and direct sunlight, as well as bright lights and loud noises.

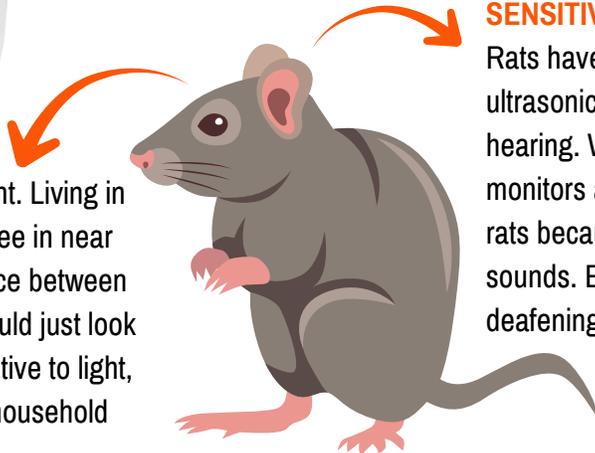
Adding small houses, ropes, hanging toys, plastic cat toys, hammocks, ladders and tubes provides stimulation and places to hide and sleep. Swap items in and out to keep your rats' home interesting. Scatter or hang nesting material like toilet paper for your rats to gather.

SENSITIVE EYES

Rats' eyes are extremely sensitive to light. Living in dark places, they evolved the ability to see in near total darkness. Rats can tell the difference between tiny changes in light intensity when it would just look pitch black to us. Since rats are so sensitive to light, bright light – sunlight and even intense household lights – can cause eye damage.

SENSITIVE EARS

Rats have excellent hearing. They can even hear ultrasonic sounds, a sound range beyond human hearing. While nearly silent to people, computer monitors and fluorescent lighting are very noisy to rats because these devices make ultrasonic sounds. Even crumpling a plastic bag could be deafening to a rat.



CARING FOR YOUR RAT

EXERCISE & PLAY

TOYS & GAMES

Rats require daily exercise and will happily romp around a small room that has been cleared of hazards such as electrical cords, cats or dogs, and poisonous plants. Keep in mind, a rat can squeeze through any opening they can get their head through! Rat-proofing is key. Always supervise playtime.



Bobbing for peas

Fill a shallow dish or bowl with about an inch of water. Pour in some peas. It won't take long for your rats to figure out how to fish for them!

Obstacle course

Create a jungle gym for your rats. Use PVC pipes, cardboard boxes, wooden ladders, the legs cut off an old pair of jeans – pretty much anything you can think of that your rats will want to explore. Then let 'em loose and watch your rats climb all over!



BUDDY UP!

Rats shouldn't be kept alone. Two or more can live together provided they're the same sex and have a large enough living space. To help prevent squabbles, rats kept in pairs should come from the same litter or be introduced to each other when they're very young.



FIRST ADOPTION OPTION

Interested in adding rats to your family? [Make adoption your first option!](#) BC SPCA Community Animal Centres often have rats available for adoption.

Benefits of adoption from the BC SPCA:

- In-Centre physical exam performed by staff
- Medical treatment by a veterinarian, if required, while in care



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CARING FOR YOUR RAT HEALTH

A HEALTHY RAT

- ✓ Eyes are clean and bright
- ✓ Ears are clean with no discharge or unpleasant odour
- ✓ Coat is smooth and shiny
- ✓ Nose is clean with no discharge or redness
- ✓ Not too fat or too thin



MEDICAL CARE



Rats are a prey species. This means they tend to hide their symptoms when they're not feeling well. Watch out for changes to your rats' eating habits and other changes in their behaviour and routines. If you notice something different, contact a veterinarian. Rats usually live for about two years.

DENTAL CARE



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



TOILET TRAINING

Some rats can be trained to use a litter box, while others may never use one consistently. But it's worth a try! A plastic cat litter pan works well. You can also use a corner litter pan designed for small animals.

TOO MANY RATS!

Rats in shelters and rescues across B.C. are in need of new homes. *Try to make adoption your first option if you love rats!*

PREVENT UNWANTED LITTERS

Never keep male and female rats together, even for a short period (unless they are neutered or spayed). Rats multiply at an amazing rate. Females can have up to 12 litters in just one year, with anywhere from six to 12 young per litter. Baby rats need to be separated by sex at 25 days of age before they begin breeding.

