

LIFESPAN - The typical lifespan for domesticated rats is 2-3 years.

HABITAT - Rats are active, social animals and should be kept in same-sex groups of at least two. The minimum cage size for a pair is 4 cubic feet, and 6 cubic feet for a trio. Multiple-level cages allow rats to explore and play. The Double Critter Nation and Rat Manor cages are popular choices that also allow for the addition of hammocks and exercise wheels, which are great sources of enrichment. Toys are another source of enrichment. Being rodents, they love to chew, so natural small animal toys that do not contain glue or dye are excellent choices to occupy them.

BEDDING - Like other small animals, rats have delicate respiratory systems. DO NOT USE wood-based bedding (e.g. cedar, pine) as the dust can cause upper-respiratory infections. We recommend paper-based bedding (soft-recycled, pelleted paper, or shredded paper) or fleece. Fleece can be washed (using fragrance and dye-free detergent) and reused.

FOOD - Rats should be free fed a high-quality pellet (e.g., Oxbow, Small Pet Select, Mazuri) without seeds or dyed pieces. Seeds contain very little nutrition and can be high in fat leading to obesity. Rats can be offered treats a few times a week. Some examples of healthy treats include carrots, pumpkin seeds, green beans, timothy hay, bananas, apples, Cheerios, cranberries, plain unsalted popcorn, cooked eggs, and peas. DO NOT FEED raisins, corn, cabbage, any citrus foods (oranges, lemons, etc.), peanuts, onions, chocolate, apple seeds, or poppy seeds. Pet stores sell yogurt treats for small animals however dairy is not tolerated well by rats and yogurt treats or other dairy products *should not be offered*.

GROOMING - Rats are very clean animals and spend much of their day grooming themselves and their companions. Because of this, baths are not needed or recommended as they are very stressful. If you notice your rat is especially dirty, they may be ill or injured and a vet visit may be in order. They normally wear their nails down on their own but may occasionally need a nail trim.

HEALTH - Rats can have health issues that require veterinary care. All rats are born carriers of a naturally occurring respiratory pathogen called Mycoplasma pulmonis (or Myco). While some rats may go their entire life without ever showing symptoms, this disease may flare up at some point in your rat's life. Symptoms of Myco include sneezing, wheezing, lethargy, and discharge from the eyes and nose. It is important to take your rat to an exotic vet as soon as possible if you notice any of these symptoms. Other symptoms that require vet care include growths/tumors, open wounds, red and swollen feet, sudden changes in behavior, head tilt, or not eating or drinking. It is important to take your rat to a vet that specializes in exotic pets. If you need a recommendation for vet care, please contact us.

BEHAVIOR - Rats are social animals and will make small noises to communicate with their companions and even with people. Here are common sounds and their meaning:

Behavior	Description	Meaning
Bruxing	Teeth grinding/clicking	Happiness/contentment (like a cat purr)
Squeaking	Loud squeaking/shrieking	Pain, surprise, discomfort
Hissing	Puff of air, rat usually puffs up	Anger, irritation, may be a warning sign
Peeping	Quiet peeping sound	Contentment, usually while grooming
Grunting	Quiet grunting sound	Excitement, happiness

Some common but unusual behaviors observed in rats include popcorning (a hop while playing or exploring) which is a sign of excitement/happiness. Rats have poor vision so they will sometimes sway their head back and forth to improve their depth perception. This is not to be confused with a head-tilt which is often accompanied by lack of coordination or loss of balance.

LITTER BOX TRAINING - Rats are very intelligent animals and can be litter boxed trained. Pet stores sell small animal litter boxes which are a great option for training. It is important to use a different litter/bedding in the litter pan than the bedding that is used in the rest of their cage.