

Diet

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

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

Handling

Proper handling of your pet is very important, and there are a few basic procedures to follow in order to avoid accidental injuries.

Mice. Mice may 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 of the tail. You may also pick him up by grasping the skin at the nape of the neck with thumb and forefinger while holding the base of the tail. If your mouse is not receptive to being picked up this way, allow him to walk into a container such as a can, plastic tube, or hiding place. Then gently lift it out of the enclosure and coax him out with a treat.

Rats. Because they are heavier than mice, rats need to be handled differently. With one hand, hold your thumb and forefinger behind their jaw and put your other fingers around its chest to provide the support needed. When lifting by the tail, always lift at the base of the tail and provide support with your other hand.

Grooming your pet regularly is part of the handling process. There are several brushes and nail trimmers on the market.

Remember that gentle handling of your mice and rats is very important. If not handled properly, they can bite.

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.

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Caring for Mice and Rats



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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 spend time getting to know your new pet and build a bond with them. The average life span of mice and rats is approximately 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 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.

What Else Do I Need?

Enrichment devices. Provide your pet with exercise wheels, hanging and rolling toys, shelves, ramps, and items to climb on that are specifically designed for rodents. Privacy should be offered by including a box or tubes for hiding and resting.

Bedding. Providing an appropriate, comfortable, and hygienic environment for your new pet is important. Purchase bedding materials such as wood shavings, corn cob, 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.

Feeding. Ceramic or hard plastic food bowls and ball-tipped sipper bottles are recommended. Sipper bottles are often preferred because they can avoid water spillage or water contamination from your pets feces.

Bringing Your Mice and Rats Home

Rats and mice are social animals, and should be kept in single-gender pairs or groups. Both mice and rats can have multiple litters per year, so maintain separate colonies by gender. Males can be aggressive with each other, and often omit a musty odor.

Avoid overcrowding and do not mix new arrivals with established colonies to prevent the possibility of fighting. Remove newborns, "pinkies," from a colony to avoid cannibalism.

Care

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

All bowls, dishes, and bottles should be cleaned daily and disinfected weekly.

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