

### **Lifespan**

With good care the average lifespan is about 2-3 years.

### **Behaviors**

Rats are social, inquisitive animals that make great companions. They very rarely bite so they are often great pets for children. Rats should be kept together in at least a pair although sometimes they may fight and need to be separated into their own cages. Males should not be kept with females unless they are neutered because they breed readily and have large amounts of babies.



Although rats are sociable and can be on a leash and harness they should not be taken to public places, especially ones with other animals around. Many people do not understand what good pets rats are and will be scared of seeing them in public places.

### **Housing**

Rats need a solid bottom wire cage at least three feet long and two feet wide. Time outside of the cage to explore a safe area is great enrichment. They will chew wood and plastic so only ceramic or metal dishes should be used. Water bowls get very dirty so water bottles attached to the side of the cage should be used. Carefresh (recycled shredded paper) bedding or layers of fleece bedding are the best options to use at the bottom of the cage. There should be several hides that your rat can get completely under to hide and sleep. Large solid sided exercise wheels should be available for activity.

Cardboard boxes offer great hiding places and rats enjoy destroying them as well. Toilet paper rolls, wooden chews, grass hay, newspaper, and other destructible toys (avoid plastic) provide good enrichment and chewing opportunities.

Rats urinate and defecate a lot so their cage should be cleaned frequently (at least 1-2 times weekly) to reduce waste odor and contamination.

### **Diet and Nutrition**

Rodent blocks and rat pellets are fortified with excellent nutrition and are much healthier than seed mixes. Avoid mixes with nuts, corn, seeds, and fruit as these will be favored and can lead to obesity. Small amounts of table scraps can be offered but should be in very limited quantity.

Good foods to offer include carrots, green beans, bananas, blueberries, grapes, and tomatoes. Foods that can be offered in moderation (no more than once a week) include strawberries, cheese, boiled eggs, pears, and garlic. You should not offer gas producing vegetables like cabbage and leeks, peppers, mushrooms, or human junk food.

Rats are prone to obesity so care must be taken not to allow your pet rats to get chubby!

### **Signs of Illness**

Upper respiratory infections are very common in rats and can be caused by bacteria like mycoplasma and the virus Sialodacryoadenitis (SDA). These are not contagious to people but can cause chronic respiratory infection flare ups in rats. Signs include sneezing, red tinged nasal and eye discharge, decreased appetite, and increased breathing rate. Antibiotics are needed for primary or secondary bacterial infections to prevent progression to pneumonia.

Mammary masses are very common in both male and female rats. These occur on the belly and even up to the shoulders as mammary tissue is extensive. These tumors are generally benign but can grow quite large and/or quickly. Surgical removal is an option that is often very successful but rats are prone to chewing out stitches after surgery.