

Rat FAQs

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Rats make wonderful, interesting pets, but many people don't know much about them. In this article, we will go over all of the common rat questions you may have so you can become a great rat owner.

How long do rats live?

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The average life span of a rat is 26 - 48 months, or a little over 2 years to 4 years.

What do rats eat?

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Rats need a diet that is low in fat and calories and high in fiber. You should feed them a pellet or block (really just a very large pellet) diet. Try to find a food with "soy meal" towards the top of the ingredient list. You should also supplement your rat's daily diet with fresh foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grain pastas and breads, and yogurt. Every once in a while you can give them fresh low fat cooked meat, cheese, seeds and nuts. You don't want to give these things too often though, as they could make your rat gain unwanted weight and become unhealthy.

What do rats live in?

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Your rat should live in a cage, and large wire cages are the best choice. Look for a tall cage so your rat can have plenty of room to climb. A tall cage should have at least 12" x 24" of floor space, and the cage will need lots of shelves and hammocks to create more play space for your rat.

Even though the best cages are wire cages, your rat should never

be allowed to run around on wire floors. Wire cage floors can cause an injury called "bumblefoot." If your cage has wire floors, cover them with a thin sheet of wood or some other protective material.

What is bumblefoot?

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If your rat has bumblefoot, he will have red bumps and lumps on the bottom of his feet. They start out small, but may grow larger, bleed, and scab over. It can be caused by living on wire cage floors. To prevent your rat from getting this, cover wire floors, use soft bedding material, and make sure your rat gets lots of exercise in and out of his cage. If you think your rat may have bumblefoot, schedule a veterinary appointment right away.

What should I put in my rat's cage?

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You should put the following things in your rat's cage:

- Bedding (wood shavings, wood fiber, etc)
- Hammocks and other hanging sacks for sleeping
- Food bowl
- Water bottles
- Toys
- Extra levels and shelves to climb on
- Exercise wheel with a solid surface, such as the Silent Spinner

Never use cedar or pine wood shavings because they are dangerous to your rat. Make sure whatever wood bedding you choose is dust free and very absorbent.

What kind of bedding should I use in my rat's cage?

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You should use three different kinds of bedding:

- Wood shavings, shredded paper, or processed corncob bedding in the bottom of the cage
- Fabric bedding such as hammocks and hanging cubes for climbing and sleeping
- Nesting material in the nest box for shredding, burrowing and sleeping

What toys will my rat like for playtime?

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Toys can be used inside and outside the cage. Inside the cage, toys will keep your rat active and happy, and they will keep him from getting bored. Rats like things that they can explore, chew, hide, climb, shred, carry, and push around. Toys that they like include chew toys, tunnels, tubes, exercise wheels, hanging bird toys, and bell ball toys. Make sure you don't give your rat soft rubber toys though! If he eats some of the rubber, it could get stuck in his stomach and form what is called a "blockage," and he could get really sick.

Can I let my rat run around in my room?

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Yes, you definitely can! Rats need lots of exercise, activity and stimulation. Your rat should get at least half an hour of time to play outside of his cage every day, and you should play with him while he's out. You have to make sure that you "rat proof" your room though. This means making sure that there is nothing dangerous that he could chew on, such as electrical cords or rubber items, since rats will chew on most anything.

Do I have to groom my rat?

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Yes, you will have to clip his nails about once every one or two months. Rats have very sharp claws, so you will have to clip the tips off. Be careful not to clip the red line running up through your rat's nail. That is called the "quick," and if you clip the quick accidentally, your rat will bleed. Make sure you have a styptic gel, powder, or pad at home to stop the bleeding in case this does happen. If you are worried about cutting your rat's nails by yourself, ask a parent to help you.

When you check your rat's nails, check his teeth too. If they are getting too long, he needs more access to chew toys. Like other rodents, rats have teeth that keep growing throughout their lives, so chewing on chew toys helps to wear their teeth down.

You can also keep a grooming kit around for your rat. Include shampoo, wipes, and a deodorizing spray. All of these things will help to keep your rat and his cage smelling clean and fresh.

Do I have to clean my rat's cage?

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Yes, your rat's cage needs to be cleaned daily, and there are some things which will need to be done weekly.

Daily:

- Remove wet, soiled bedding
- Wash out the food bowl and give your rat fresh food
- Wash out the water bottle and give him fresh water
- Clean up any messes or spills in the cage

Weekly:

- Replace all of the bedding
- Wash the cage
- Wash all toys, ramps, shelves, and other accessories