

Rattie Ratz's Rat Information Sheets

Rattie Ratz recommends

Bedding

Commercial Products: CareFresh, Aspen shavings, Alpha-Dri, Yesterday's News, Cel-Sorb, alfalfa pellets, Diamond Soft, Critter Country – do not use clay based cat litters. **NEVER** USE PINE OR CEDAR SHAVINGS!

Non-Commercial Products: Non-looped thread towels, clean old towels and t-shirts, clean old sheets, disposable white paper towels, and newspaper printed with **soy ink**.

Cage Accessories

Cages must be equipped with a water bottle, food dish, and place to hide.

Rats are happier with other toys; hammocks, igloos, small cardboard boxes (think 12-pack of soda boxes), tissue boxes, plastic pipes and tubes, clean flower pots, old cloth purses without embellishments, etc.

Suitable wheels (no bar-wire wheels) should be offered to the rats, primarily females. Give them several days to decide if they want to use it or not. If they are obviously not using it after 5-7 days, they probably don't need/want it.

Cage space requirements

Each rat in your home should be allocated at least 2 cubic feet of cage space. Rattie Ratz highly recommends Martin's Cages (www.martinscages.com) NEVER use a cage with 1"x1/2" mesh for the shelves or floors. Powder coated cages are preferred over galvanized cages.

Martins 660 – The Rat Cubbyhole - 24" x 14" x 16" – 1 rat (use only for quarantine for sick rat)
Martins 670 – The Rat Cabin - 24" x 14" x 24" – 2-3 (female) rats, 1-2 (male) rats
Martins 695 – The Rat Skyscraper - 30" x 18" x 36" – 5-8 rats

Diet

Rattie Ratz recommends either 2014 or 2018 Harlan Teklad lab blocks, or Oxbow Regal Rat.

2014 is for adults over 8 months

2018 is for pregnant, nursing and growing rats 8 months and younger

Harlan Teklad lab blocks are available online through TheRatShop.com

Also provide fresh vegetables (and/or fruit) to supplement their diet (no more than 20% of their daily intake though!). This is a great way to bond with shy rats, and to play games with your rats.

Generally, if you would eat a food, you can give it to your rats. Exceptions on next page.

Forbidden Foods

raw dry beans or peanuts — contains anti-nutrients that destroy vitamin A and enzymes needed to digest protein and starches, and causes red blood cells to clump
raw sweet potato — contains compounds that form cyanide in the stomach
green bananas — inhibits starch-digesting enzymes
green potato skin and eyes — contain solanine, a toxin
wild insects — can carry internal parasites and diseases
raw bulk tofu — can contain bacteria, packaged raw tofu is safe
orange juice — forbidden for male rats only, d-limonene in the skin oil, which gets into the orange juice during squeezing, can cause kidney damage and kidney cancer due to a protein that only male rats have in their kidneys.

"Taming" Rats – Forced Socialization

Young rats are best 'tamed' through excessive gentle handling (forced socialization), while older rats may require more time and trust training to overcome their fear. Forced socialization is a technique based on the idea that rats cannot maintain their fear for over 20 minutes.

The idea is to have the rat in contact with you constantly for at least 20 minutes after which period her fear will begin to subside. This should be done at least daily, and although the rat can move around on your body she should not be allowed to lose contact with you at all during this time. No fearful creature would want to be 'imprisoned' in your hands for such a length of time, but if allowed to sit on your shoulder, have a stroke on your lap or hide in your shirt, the fear will soon subside. Do use your hands at times (to stroke, scratch, cuddle) so that she becomes used to the idea that hands bring comfort and pleasure (and treats).

Rat Games

Playing with your ratties is fun! Sure, you can come up with all sorts of creative toys to keep them entertained and stimulated, but why should the rats have *all* the fun? There's no better way to bond with your fuzzies than to get right in there with them and shake things up. Sometimes it's enough just to sit on the floor of their free-ranging area and let *them* lead the games. In case they run out of ideas, though, here are some suggestions to get you started:

Hide and seek:

Hide a yogurt drop somewhere under your clothes. Add rat.

Go Fetch:

Offer your rat a piece of paper towel and watch while he grabs it and leaps with delight to drag it off and stash it in his nest box. Repeat.

Hand Wrestling:

Make your hand chase and wrestle with your rat. Tip him over and groom their belly with your fingernails. Just remember to let your rat win occasionally. This is a favorite of young ratlets.

Chase the human around the couch

- a. Place rats on couch, the more the better. Then walk around couch.
- b. Watch in glee as stream of rats follows your every move.
- c. Stretch out arms. Watch ratties climb. Snuggle.

Note: this game can be adapted to a bed, or to anywhere else you free-range your rats!

The Daily Health Check

By doing a daily health check, you will be aware of the rat's physique and behavior which will help you see any changes that indicate the need to take a trip to the vet. When you are familiar with doing health checks, the whole process only takes a minute. That's one minute of care to provide peace of mind for an entire day!

1. Breathing:

Learn to spot symptoms of respiratory infections before they become advanced to the point of emergency intervention. Listen for abnormal breathing sounds such as wheezing, congestion, or clicking noises. Note any abnormalities such as labored breathing or gasping. Other signs may include: discharge from the eyes or nose, poor appetite, hunched posture or puffed up fur. A rat with a respiratory infection will need to be treated to prevent chronic respiratory problems.

2. Teeth:

Look at the rat's teeth and gums to see if there is any misalignment of teeth, gum swelling, redness, pus, or foul odor. In adult rats, the uppers are dark yellow-orange and the lowers are yellow. The incisors should be even, not too long and not piercing the cheeks or gum. Oral infections can be aggressive and need early medical intervention to be resolved.



3. Eyes:

Check the rat's eyes to assure they are clear, bright and free of discharge. Look for cloudiness or ulcerations. Bulging eyes may be indicative of SDA infection, tumors or an abscess behind the eye.

4. Ears:

Check the rat's ears for discharge, growths or unusual odors.



5. Injuries and Wounds:

Visually inspect your rat's body for bleeding, cuts, bites and bruising.

6. Tail and Feet:

Visually inspect your rat's tail and feet for injuries or symptoms of bumblefoot (feet) and ringtail (tail).

7. Movement:

Remove the rat from its cage and watch it walk. Keep your eyes open for trembling, limping, tilting, circling or weakness in the limbs. Note the general posture and the activity level. A rat exhibiting a "hunched up" posture or lethargy may not be feeling well.

8. Body:

Carefully massage the rat's body with your fingers checking for lumps, swelling, or areas of sensitivity that might indicate growths, swelling or pain.

9. Fur and Skin:

Watch the rat's behavior to see if it is scratching excessively and check for any hair loss. Look at the skin and fur for possible parasites. Fleas and lice are large enough to see. Mites are harder to see, but often you will see nits in the hair shaft or a characteristic scabbing around the rat's face, shoulders and neck.

10. Genital Area:

Female: Examine your female rat's vaginal opening for any discharge or blood. In a non-pregnant rat, this could mean a problem such as a uterine infection (often mycoplasma), cysts or tumors.

Male: In a male, check the penis for discharge. (Occasionally you will need to inspect closer by pushing back the sheath to make sure there is no blockage.)

11. Color:

Check the extremities (feet, ears, tail, paws, etc.) for either pale or heightened skin color.

12. Odor:

Sniffing your rat may help alert you to problems. Learn your rat's "normal" odor. A "bad" smell may be indicative of infection. A sickly sweet smell could be diabetes.

13. Hydration:

You can perform what is called a "pinch test" to check for dehydration. Using two fingers, take a little fold of skin on the rat's back and lift up. When you let go, the skin should return to its normal position. If the skin stays raised, even for a few seconds, your rat may be dehydrated.

14. Temperature:

Get to know what your rat's normal temperature "feels" like so you can recognize when the rat is too cool to the touch or fevered.

For a list of reputable and well-qualified veterinarians across Northern California, please visit www.thesocialrat.com

You should arrange to have your newly adopted rat **visit a veterinarian within 72 hours of adoption** to help you establish a good vet and have a sense of what your rat's health status is.



Quarantine: Time recommended and What to Look For

The term quarantine means to separate and isolate to prevent the spread of disease. With newly adopted rats, this includes bacterial infections, viruses, and fungi.

After taking in any rats into your home (Rattie Ratz, personal, or otherwise), ALL of the rats in your home are considered "in mandatory quarantine" for a minimum of 2 weeks. Rattie Ratz recommends this when rats are adopted at Adoption Fairs because they are exposed to other rats at the fair, as well as any bacteria and germs on the handlers clothing.

Quarantining at a separate rat-free location and maintaining a persistent quarantine environment is possibly the most efficient way to prevent illness and/or death from contagious disease in a colony. However, if this is not possible, house your newly-adopted rats in a closed off room such as another bedroom or bathroom (provided it is warm in the room) and remember to handle the newly-adopted rats last. Wash and change your clothes or even shower in between handling your rats and the newly-adopted rats. By doing this, you avoid direct contact of any bacteria between rats, thus reducing the chance of spreading a virus.

Even if they were quarantined in another person's home for 3 weeks and then you brought them in to your own home, doesn't guarantee the rats won't contract an illness. The risk of them spreading a virus is still present. Think of it this way....when you have healthy children, they go to a daycare center and then 2 weeks later they come down with a cold or the flu. Each child's immune system is different and each child has antibodies to a different strain of whatever virus. When they come into contact with an unfamiliar strain of the cold or the flu, they get sick. The same thing happens with rats.

During the quarantine, it is important you watch for any signs of illness. Most illnesses will show themselves within about the first week. If no illness is noted, then your quarantine is over in 2 weeks. If illness is noted, contact your vet to begin treatment immediately. **Quarantine ends 2 weeks after onset of symptoms** OR 10-14 days after symptoms go away – whichever is LONGER.

Signs of illness may include, but are not limited to, any of the following:

Excessive porphyrin secretions from eyes and/or nose	Swelling on neck or body	Visual identification of parasites including lice nits
Sneezing	Abscesses	Abnormal odor from rat
Wheezing	Scabs or itching	Abnormal smelling feces or urine
Rough coat	Diarrhea	Respiratory distress
Labored breathing	Constipation	Head tilt or abnormal gait
Lethargy	Lack of appetite	Thinness
Hunched Posture	Eye ulcerations, bleeding or swelling	

Quarantine is a perfect time to bond with your new rats without having to compete for attention with your other resident rats. Quarantine also allows the adopter to learn more about your new rats' personalities and find out what kind of toys or treats your new rat likes.

After quarantine is over, it is safe to move your new rats' cage to the main rat room.

Rat to Rat Introductions *

by Debbie Ducommun (of Rat Fan Club)

The willingness of rats to accept a new roommate depends on their personality and age. It will take more time--sometimes up to several weeks--to introduce a newcomer to adult rats, but it can be done. With time and patience, almost any rat will accept a newcomer.

The introduction process has several steps and the time required for each may vary. The easiest pairing will be two young rats, while the most difficult introduction is between two adult males, especially if they aren't neutered. On the other hand, as rats start to age they can mellow out and be more accepting of new roommates. A young rat is the best choice for a new roommate for an adult male, but the newcomer should be at least six weeks old. This is because adult males will sometimes kill strange baby rats younger than this.

When introducing rats, you should have two cages so the new rat can have his own cage at first. (The second cage can be the resident rat's travel cage.) Never just plop a new rat in the resident rats' cage because the residents will always defend their territory.

During the introduction process, you should only advance to the next step if there is no sign of aggression within 30 minutes. A resident rat will express aggression by puffing up his fur, arching his back, and swinging his body sideways at the newcomer. If you see this type of behavior, remove the new rat quickly to prevent an attack. Use care when picking up an aggressive rat as they will sometimes bite. Pick them up with a towel. Or if need to quickly break up a fight, you can pick up the aggressor by the base of his tail. If an introductory session results in aggression, try again later, or go back a step.

When introducing a new rat to a group of rats, usually only the dominant resident rat will be aggressive toward the newcomer at first. This is the dominant rat's "job". Once the new rat is accepted by the dominant rat, the others may show some aggression in turn, but it usually won't be as severe.



* (Please note: this page and the following page are directly from ratfanclub.org/newrat.html).

The Introduction Process:

The first step is to place the cages near each other so the rats can see and smell each other. Place wire cages far enough apart so the rats can't reach through the bars to the other cage, or the result may be bitten toes or tail. The next step is to switch the rats to each other's cage, even briefly. This allows them first-hand experience with each other's scent. You may have to do this several times.

The next step is to introduce the rats in neutral territory, which should be someplace where the resident rats are not used to playing. The bathtub is a good place. This will give them a chance to become acquainted without the residents feeling the need to defend their territory. Another technique that can work is to take the rats for a car ride in a neutral carrier.

The next step is to let them interact in an area where the residents are used to playing. Watch them carefully, because this is where some fighting may break out. It may also help if you put the new rat(s) in your lap along with the other rats. By holding everyone at the same time, it may let the residents know that YOU have already accepted the new rat.

The final step is to clean the larger cage out completely and rearrange the furnishings so it appears to be a new cage. Trim the back toenails of the rats to minimize scratching in a scuffle. Put vanilla extract or perfume on all the rats to make them smell the same. Then put the rats in this cage. The best time to do this is in the morning when rats tend to be sleepy.

The dominant resident will probably sniff the newcomer and then "attack" him, forcing him over on his back. If you've followed the introduction process correctly, don't rush to take the new rat out. Instead, carefully observe the fight. Observe whether the resident rat is showing the raised hair, arched back, and sideways approach that are signs of aggression. If so, remove the newcomer, but if not, leave them together. The resident rat must establish his or her dominance and it's normal for them to "beat up" the newcomer. Just because the new rat is squeaking doesn't mean it's getting hurt. This is just a rat's way of saying "I give up". As long as you have followed the introduction process step by step, and as long as the resident rat isn't showing the signs of aggression, you should let the fight run its course. If you take the new rat out, you'll prolong this adjustment phase.

However, if it appears that the new rat is being injured, or if the attack seems especially vicious, then of course you should remove him from the cage. But in most cases the "fight" will be over quickly. The dominant resident rat will probably beat up the newcomer frequently for the first few days, and you shouldn't interfere as long as there are no injuries. But the first attack is usually the worst, and before long the rats will typically become the best of friends, sleeping together and grooming each other.

One of my members also suggested something that worked well for her. She smeared all her rats with pudding! After they got it all licked off each other, they had bonded! But this was a group of rats who had lived in the same house for a while, not brand new rats. You would still need to go through all the preliminary steps first.

Because rats are individuals with their own personalities, occasionally two rats will take a dislike to each other and constantly fight. In some cases, this means the pecking order is changing and the fighting will stop eventually. Neutering any males involved will usually solve the problem. (After a male is neutered, it can take up to 8 weeks for their behavior to change.) However, if these fights continue for more than several weeks, such rats should be separated permanently.

Surrendering Rats Back to Rattie Ratz (rats previously in our foster system)

WELCOME BACK! Welcome Back! is a program available to all of our adoptive families. Although we try our best to ensure an excellent match, there are certain things that are beyond our control. If, for any reason, you need to rehome an animal adopted from our organization, we welcome our animals back with open arms. Generally speaking, the returned animal will go back to the foster home who was caring for the animal prior to adoption.

Please contact Rattie Ratz first to see if your issue may be resolved before considering returning your adopted rat. (Fewer transfers from home to home, means a happier and healthier rat).



Rattie Ratz Contact Information

General Information (may take up to a week to return your message):
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