

## New Pet Shopping List

- ☑ Water bottle
- ☑ Housing - Large cage
- ☑ Toys - Igloo, Hanging hammock, PVC tubes, Hanging bird toys
- ☑ Safe litter – such as aspen shavings, Back-2-Nature small animal bedding, Breeders Choice Litter, shredded paper, toilet paper or paper towels, old ripped up towels or sheets. Don't use non-paper based kitty litter, as it can clog in their stomach.
- ☑ Food – lab blocks or good quality low protein dog food, fresh fruit & veggies, treats such as yoghurt drops.
- ☑ Veterinarian – It's important you have a vet that has experience with rats. All animals can require vet care, and it's peace of mind to know of a good one in advance.

## Common Myths

MYTH: Rats are dirty animals and spread the plague!

FACT: Rats are very clean; spending ½ their waking hours grooming and cleaning themselves. Because of this, they do not smell unpleasant, though their cage will need to be cleaned, as they can't do this themselves. The plague was spread by humans and fleas. In fact, rats are more likely to catch something from you, than you will from them.

MYTH: Rats bite!

FACT: You're more likely to be bitten by a dog.

## Resources

### NZ Websites:

Ratclub.org – The Kiwi Rat Resource.  
<http://www.ratclub.org>

### Diet:

Suebee's Diet – A popular homemade diet.  
<http://www.ratsrule.com/diet.htm>

### The Dapper Rat Diet

<http://www.dapper.com.au/diet.htm>

### Forbidden Food

<http://www.ratfanclub.org/diet.html>

### Health:

The RMCA Drug Guide - An invaluable resource that has a list of drugs, treatments and dosages for common ailments.

<http://www.rmca.org/Articles/dchart.htm>

Rat Guide - Another invaluable resource which has sections on Health, Care and Medication. The Medication Guide is a great compliment to the RMCA Drug Guide.

<http://www.ratguide.com>

# Your pet rat: a rat care guide



Prepared by:  
Ratclub.org – The Kiwi Rat Resource  
[www.ratclub.org](http://www.ratclub.org)

## The Perfect Pet

Rats make wonderful pets. They are highly intelligent, friendly, loyal and playful animals, and love human attention.

They're also social creatures and need the company of other rats, so it's important you get at least 2 rats of the same gender. This won't stop them from bonding with you. Confident rats will bond more closely to their human owner.

## Handling & Play

Rats need at least an hour outside of their cage a day to play and interact with you.

When you pick up your rat, never pick it up by its tail. This is stressful, and can be painful for them and cause injury, it also makes them feel unsafe. Instead, gently scoop your rat up using one or both hands from underneath around the middle, supporting their feet.

## Diet

Rats generally need their diet to be about 75- 80% carbohydrates, 15 - 18 % protein, and around 4 - 6% fat. Most seed mixes are too high in fat and protein and shouldn't be their staple diet. Lab blocks such as Diet 86 or Harlan Teklad alone are good, or a quality low protein dog food such as Nutro Lite, along with other grains such as rolled oats, dried veggie pasta, pumpkin seeds, puffed wheat and puffed rice is a good diet. Always supplement your dry food with a little fresh fruit and vegetables daily. Healthy leftovers from your dinner are ok too. Rats should also have access to fresh water at all times, supplied in a water bottle.

Some foods are dangerous to rats. For more information, check out Resources section.

## Housing

Rats need lots of space to run around, and require a large cage. Mice cages are not suitable cages, as they're far too small. A large wire cage with levels is good. The Masterpet Rat Starter Kit is ideal for 2 rats. Modified bird aviaries and cabinet cages that can be made out of an old bookcase, a chest of draws, or from a kitset also made good cages.

Make sure the cage has good ventilation, as rat urine produces ammonia vapours that can hurt a rat's respiratory systems. A rat's cage needs to be cleaned at least weekly, and all the contents of the cage washed. Aspen shavings are a good bedding, as are Back-2-Nature small animal bedding & paper based cat litters such as Breeders Choice. Shredded paper, soy based newspaper and old towels and rags are also good bedding for rats. Pine and Cedar wood chip beddings should not be used as they damage the respiratory tract, causing chronic respiratory disease, and asthma.

## Breeding

Breeding rats should not be taken lightly. Breeding any animal responsibly means making an effort to improve the species as a whole, and rats are no exception. It's important to know the genetic history of rats that are bred so lines with possible health problems are not continued.

If you do want to breed, be responsible. Obtain an animal from a reputable breeder, learn about rat genetics, and never breed an animal with poor health or temperament. Do a lot of research, so you know what you're getting yourself in for.

The average litter is 10 – 12 but a rat can give birth to as many as 20 babies, so it's important you have homes lined up for them, and are prepared to keep the rats you can't find homes for.

## Rat Health Care

Like any animal, rats can get sick. Rats are susceptible to respiratory disease. Symptoms of a respiratory infection include any noises while breathing (grunting, whistling, wheezing, etc.) and sneezing. Lethargy is also a sign that your rat is not feeling well. Its important respiratory infections are treated promptly with a round of antibiotics.

Female rats are more prone to mammary tumors than males, especially as they age. Most tumors are benign, and can often be surgically removed.

Rats can also get scabby skin, caused by skin parasites such as mites or an allergy, or too much protein in the rat's diet.

Although rats are hardy little critters, they can fall ill and can do so quite quickly so any indication that your rat could be ill should be taken very seriously. Rats deserve as much care and responsibility as any other pet and that includes vet care.

## Rat Facts

- Rats are sexually mature at only 5 weeks of age. If females this age or older are housed with males, they are likely to be pregnant.
- Pet rats usually live to an age of two to three years.
- Males are larger than females and tend to be a bit less active.
- Rats cannot vomit and therefore do not need to fast before surgery.