



Dr David Vella BSc BVSc (Hons) DABVP
t 02 9572 6854 f 02 9572 6159
e david.vella@bigpond.com
w www.davidvella.com.au
North Shore Veterinary Specialist Centre
a 64 Atchison St Crows Nest NSW 2065
t 02 9436 4884 f 02 9906 5710

PET RAT CARE

Vital Statistics

Life expectancy	2 - 3.5 years	Weaning	3 weeks
Breeding	4 - 5 weeks	Pregnancy	21 - 23 days
Litter size	6 - 13	Adult body weight	225 - 500g

Rats are a **rodent** animal. They can make ideal pets due to their **small size, ease of care & quiet nature**. They can be very **interactive & sociable** animals who readily accept human companionship. Rats are also known to be intelligent animals. They are fastidiously clean animals & can become very used to handling, especially if handling is started at a young age.

Housing

- Rats can be housed in a range of cage types. Provide a **cage as large as possible** and ensure that it is easy to clean & well ventilated. Bird cage type enclosures are superior to plastic/glass tubs.
- Ensure that the area that they're kept in will **not become too hot** as they are prone to heat stress
- Regularly **clean the cage** & change their bedding to avoid ammonia build up
- Suitable **bedding materials** include shredded paper or pelleted recycled paper 'cat-litter'. Rats love to burrow, so make sure a good thickness of bedding is provided
- Make certain that the cage is **predator proof**
- Provide **boxes** etc for 'hiding' places, and 'hammocks' for sleeping areas.
- Use **dripper type water bottles**. Water bowls are likely to become soiled
- Rats are sociable animals, consider housing at least 2 together. They can also be housed in colonies

Handling

- Rats can usually be handled quite easily. Pick them up by gently placing your hand(s) under them & be sure to support the full length of their body
- Encourage **daily handling** & play/explore time outside of their cage
- Rats should be provided with **daily exercise & mental stimulation** to avert obesity & boredom
- Be sure to **wash your hands** after handling your rats

Feeding

- Rats are omnivores (they eat plant & animal material). They will eat a wide variety of food if offered
- Rats can be offered small amounts of good quality rat pellets or rat cubes (ensure they have a protein content of at least 16% & fat content of 4-5%) & ad lib Fresh fruits & vegetables daily. Some examples of these include;
Fruit & Vegies: apples, pears, banana, melons, stone fruits, citrus fruits, broccoli, cabbage, brussel sprouts, endive, carrots, Bok Choy/other Asian greens, celery, parsley, berries, tomato, fresh corn, beans, peas
- Avoid feeding rats a seed/grain mix. Rats are very prone to becoming obese & malnourished on these mixes. They tend to 'select' their favourite bits in the mix
- **Treats** (should only be offered in very small amounts!) Cereals, grains, seeds, breads, biscuits, sweets, cooked pasta & rice, breakfast cereals, chocolate!

Health and Veterinary Care

- Have any newly acquired pet rat checked by a vet, especially if you intend to mix the rat with others. Thereafter have them **checked at least annually**
- At home you should always monitor closely your rats food intake, body condition, eyes, ears, mouth, feet & toilet-ing behaviour