**Rats – Care Sheet**

**Rat:** Rattus norvegicus

Most people only know rats as the creatures that scurry around in the New York City subway looking for food. Rats, however, are excellent pets for people who have limited space and want a pet that is easy to take care of. Taking some simple steps should help your rat stay happy and healthy.

**Basic Info:**

Also known as: Norway rat or brown rat

Lifespan: 2-3 years

Sexual maturity: 6-8 weeks

Gestation: 21 days

**Behavior**

Rats are a great choice to have as a pet if you are looking into adopting an exotic pet because they are:

* Clean
* Quiet
* Friendly
* Intelligent

Because they are so social, we recommend adopting rats in pairs. Adults hardly ever fight, and they only bite people if they are very scared. They are also sensitive animals who need lots of love and attention from their owners who they will usually develop a very strong bond with. A happy rat is also usually more active and healthy. They are also trainable and can learn tricks and commands. If you work all day, a pet rat is a great choice, because they are typically active at night.

**Diet**

Rats have a simple diet. You can find rat “lab-blocks” in most pet stores. This provides the balanced nutrition that rats need. You can also provide your rat with fresh fruits and vegetables in moderation as a healthy snack. Make sure the rat’s cage has a water bottle that is always full of fresh, clean water. Rats are omnivores, so if you touch meat, make sure you wash your hands so your rat isn’t tempted to bite you.

Rats will eat just about anything in sight, so it is important that the

food it has is healthy. Avoid treats that are high in sugar and fat, as obesity can become a problem. Protein should also be limited.

We can discuss proper nutrition if you have questions about treats and food brands.

**Environment & Caging**

Rats are nocturnal, meaning they are primarily active at night. As such, they will benefit from a cage that is placed in a more dimly lit area of the house. Because they are highly social and curious, however, they should still be placed near where most activity occurs that is also between 65-75°F.

We recommend a large, well-ventilated wire cage with a solid bottom for your rat. It is important that it has enough room to move around and exercise. Multi-level cages are ideal for rats. The cage should include:

* A nesting box that your rat can sleep and hide in when it wants. Make sure the box is big enough for your rat to move around in.
* Paper and cardboard that your rat can tear up and make nesting material. Your rat will be very happy if it has the material to burrow with!
* Bedding made from aspen shavings or recycled newspaper material (avoid cedar and pine).
* An exercise wheel

**Veterinary Care & Home Care**

We recommend a physical examination every 6-12 months, where we will perform a fecal examination for parasites and do blood tests if necessary. We also recommend spaying females, as this can prevent mammary gland tumors that commonly develop.

Make sure your rat gets plenty of exercise to avoid obesity. Other conditions to look out for (remember to call your vet if you are worried about something) can include respiratory infections, incisor malocclusion, head tilt, parasites, and inflammation of the salivary gland.