

## PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE

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Common health problems in rats include:

- **Parasites**, the most common being lice and mites. Symptoms include repeated scratching, hair loss and inflamed skin. See a veterinarian. Treatment may require a topical medication and/or injections.
- **Upper respiratory infections**. Symptoms include labored breathing, eye and nostril discharge, lethargy, reduced appetite and sneezing. See a vet immediately. This infection can rapidly lead to death.
- **Lumps**. Monitor your rat for unusual growths on the skin. These growths could be abscesses, benign cysts or cancerous tumors. See a vet. Treatment may require surgery or antibiotics.
- **Overgrown nails**. Nails should be trimmed every 3–4 weeks, at home or by a veterinary technician.

Veterinary examinations every 6–12 months are recommended, as well as a routine check-up after adopting your rat. Neutering or spaying rats around 6 months of age is recommended to reduce risk of tumors.

Visit a vet immediately if your rat has any of the following symptoms: reduced appetite, diarrhea, no feces, drooling, bloating, lethargy, difficulty urinating, itchiness or hair loss.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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For more comprehensive information on rat care, visit:

- [thesprucepets.com](http://thesprucepets.com)
- [rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rodents/rats](http://rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/rodents/rats)
- [ratcentral.com](http://ratcentral.com)
- [seavs.com](http://seavs.com)

### Area Vets

#### Stahl Exotic Animal Veterinary Services

4015 Rust Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22030  
(703) 491-1111

#### Pender Veterinary Clinic

4001 Legato Rd.  
Fairfax, VA 22033  
(703) 654-3100

#### Paws, Purrs & Exotics

5838-A North Kings Highway  
Alexandria, VA 22033  
(703) 549-7297

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[tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9](http://tinyurl.com/y4s5clm9)

### Animal Welfare League of Arlington

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2650 Arlington Mill Dr.  
Arlington, VA 22206

Phone: (703) 931-9241  
[www.awla.org](http://www.awla.org)  
E-mail: [mail@awla.org](mailto:mail@awla.org)

## CARING FOR RATS

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### A BASIC GUIDE TO HUSBANDRY AND PREVENTATIVE HEALTHCARE





## DIET

### Food

- A commercial rat pellet or rodent block diet, such as **Oxbow Essentials Adult Rat Food**, should be available for your rat at all times and comprise the majority of the diet.
- Fruits (e.g. bananas, melons, apples without seeds), vegetables (e.g. broccoli, carrots, peas), grains, unsweetened cereal and timothy hay or orchard grass can be given as treats.
- **Do not feed** rats grapes, raisins, rhubarb, walnuts, lettuce or citrus fruits. Avoid “people food,” seeds and commercial treat sticks, as they are high in fat and low in protein.

### Water

- Provide water in a commercially available water bottle. Change water daily.

## HOUSING AND GENERAL CARE

### Caging

- Cages should provide a minimum of 1 by 3 feet of space per rat.
- Cage floors should be plastic or steel, not wire.
- A wire bar cage is optimal, but rats can be housed in aquariums as long as they are cleaned multiple times per week.

### Environment

Rat cages should contain:

- A hiding place, such as an upturned cardboard box, paper towel roll or commercially available plastic igloo.
- Safe materials, such as non-toxic cardboard, untreated wood or commercially available chew toys, to encourage natural chewing behavior and prevent dental disease.
- Toys, such as running wheels, hammocks, and parrot toys (e.g. swings, ladders and ropes), to encourage exercise and prevent boredom.
- Unlimited access to water in a water bottle and rat pellets in a bowl. Check water bottle daily to ensure that it is functioning and your rat is drinking.

Rat cages should not be placed in direct sunlight or in a drafty area. The optimal temperature for rat housing is 72–80°F.

### Bedding

- Rat cages should be lined with a paper based bedding such as Carefresh. Do not use wood shavings or cat litter.
- Be sure to provide enough bedding for your rat to burrow or build its own nest.
- Bedding should be spot cleaned daily and changed weekly. Wash cage components thoroughly.

## BEHAVIOR

- Rats are generally nocturnal, and are most active from dusk to dawn.
- Rats use their whiskers to assess their surroundings. Never trim a rat’s whiskers.
- Rats’ eyes often bulge out of their sockets while they grind their teeth. This behavior is normal and can indicate either contentedness or stress.
- Consider training your rat to perform simple tasks for a food reward to encourage mental stimulation and strengthen rat-human bonds.
- Rats are social animals and should ideally be kept in same-sex pairs, or with a spayed or neutered rat of the opposite sex. Monitor rats for fighting and separate if necessary. Solitary rats should be handled daily.

### Handling

- When picking up a rat, support its body with both hands. Do not allow small children to handle rats without adult supervision.
- When allowing a rat to explore outside its cage, be sure to do so in a closed-off area. Keep harmful products and dangerous objects out of your rat’s reach.

