

HOUSING

Rats are active creatures that need space to run around. Multi-level cages are available but make sure that it has secure closure. Cage bottoms should be solid, not wire or screen, to prevent foot problems or leg injuries. The best bedding to use for rats are made from paper pulp, such as Carefresh, Yesterday's News, newspapers or computer paper without ink. Some rats with severe respiratory problems will sometimes do better bedding on towels because they decrease the amount of dust that the rat is exposed to. Hide boxes can be purchased or made out of paper towel rolls, tissue boxes and similar things should be offered to all a safe, undisturbed place to sleep. Wheels are a good way to provide exercise inside the cage. It must be the appropriate size and have a solid running surface. Exercise outside the cage should always be supervised to prevent injury. If you want to cage rats together. Neutered males or females may live harmoniously, however, watch for fighting because they can cause severe injuries to each other.

DIET

Rodent blocks or other complete diets (www.oxbowhay.com) should be offered "free-choice". These will provide all the nutrition that a rat needs to lead a happy and healthy life. Seed mixes or treats lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies and contribute to obesity as well. Seed or other treat sticks should not be left in the cage because they are not nutritious. You can use seeds as treats, in small portions, a few times a week. Other treats you can use are small pieces of vegetables, fruits, unsweetened cereal or hay. Fresh water should be available at all times. Either a water bottle or spill-proof bowl can be used and should be changed daily. Cleaning the bowls or bottles is important to preventing bacterial overgrowth which can contribute to health problems.

VETERINARY CARE

A visit to the veterinarian is an important stop after acquiring a new rat whether young or older. This helps prevent any illnesses from getting worse or from being transmitting to other rats at home. Yearly exams are recommended for all rats because they are prone to external parasites, respiratory infections which, if not treated, can turn into life-threatening pneumonia and mammary tumors. Spaying and neutering rats around before 6 months can help prevent mammary tumors from developing and other behavioral problems. They can also develop overgrown incisor teeth or abscesses from bite wounds. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please contact our office at 240-687-1414.