



# A Guide to Keeping RATS & MICE

## KEEPING RATS AND MICE

### CAGE SIZE

This depends on the number of animals but in general the bigger the better. High cages are more appropriate than wide ones as rats and mice love to climb and view the room from above. Rats and mice are social creatures so avoid having just one animal by itself.



Rats and mice breed like rabbits, so unless you are planning to breed them, make sure any pets kept together are the same gender.

### BEDDING AND LITTER

You can use un-treated wood shavings, shredded white paper or hay in the bottom of the cage.



Your pets will also produce more litter by chewing wooden and cardboard items into small pieces.

An important accessory is a nest box or wooden house. These should be warm and cozy and can be filled with toilet paper, shredded paper and hay. Wooden houses are likely to get chewed on and may need to be replaced occasionally, but chewing ensures normal wear and tear of teeth and prevents over-grown incisors.



## ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT



Rats and mice are very playful animals and love variety in their cage. Putting different layers in the cage provides more room to play and climb and you can connect the different layers with little wooden ladders, twigs or ropes. Rats in particular love hammocks in their cage, be it bought ones or a home-made hammock from a piece of fleece or cloth.

Empty toilet paper rolls and cartons provide hours of fun and chewing and are often added to the bedding in the nest box.

Rats and mice also like an exercise wheel for running. Sturdy metal or plastic ones are best, avoid wire ones as it can hurt your pets feet. Rats in particular need lots of cuddles and attention and enjoy free roaming in a rat-safe room.



Digging boxes with sand or chemical free potting mix can be placed in the cage and rats can even be litter tray trained like cats.

## CLEANING THE CAGE

The cage will need cleaning every few days to avoid build-up of faeces and urine

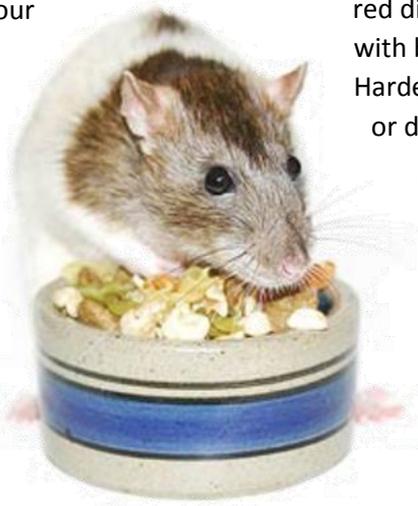
soaked litter. Replace bedding and litter as needed and provide fresh hay and toilet paper rolls often.

## FEEDING RATS AND MICE

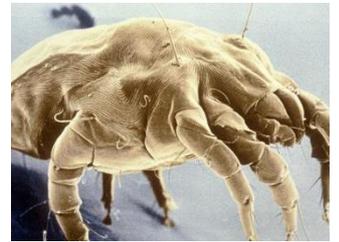
Pelleted food provides good, basic nutrition and is available from most pet shops. Your pet may also enjoy oats or wheat, green vegetables, apples and carrots.

For training you can use small pieces of fruit and veges like strawberries, watermelons, apple, carrots as well as Ricies or individual cornflakes.

To avoid a mess in the cage put fruit and veges on a Ka-Bob stick. A range of cage accessories are available and can be ordered in for you by our friendly staff.



treatable but any drugs need to be used with extreme caution as overdose can cause illness or death.



Note: rats can produce a red discharge from the eyes that is often confused with bleeding. They are porphyrins secreted from the Harderian glands near the eyes and are a sign of stress or disease in rats.

If you notice any of the above symptoms - or diarrhoea, excessive water drinking or loss of appetite – please consult your vet or vet nurse at Levin and Horowhenua Vets.

## HEALTH PROBLEMS IN RATS AND MICE

Common signs of ill health are sneezing, snuffling, weight loss, in-appetence and a runny nose. These can be a sign of pneumonia and require veterinary attention.



As incisors continue to grow throughout life, malocclusion can occur causing your pet to be unable to eat properly and to drool. Providing wooden items to chew on can help prevent this.

Rats and mice are prone to overheating in high temperatures as they can't sweat or pant, so make sure to provide shade in summer or move the cage to a cooler room.

Rats and mice are prone to developing various tumours as they age. These lumps can be benign or aggressive depending on the type. Some tumours can be removed under a general anaesthetic. There are also tests available to find out what kind of tumour is present and what the likelihood of recurrence and spread is.

Lice and mites can affect your pets and cause intense itching and skin problems like scabs and hair loss. It is

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