

# The McPet Shop

## RAT

### General Information

The domestic rat is different in origin and behaviour from the wild one often associated with disease. Indeed the pet rat is one of the best pets for older children. They are sociable, intelligent and bond closely with their owners. They are easy to handle when encouraged from an early age and enjoy human company. A rat will only bite when cornered or frightened. They enjoy company, so it is best to keep two or more animals of the same sex together, and this is easier if they are from the same litter. If you mix the sexes, males can be neutered.

### Housing

Rats have strong teeth for gnawing and will often chew through wood. A large glass fish tank is ideal housing, but it is important to ensure that the top allows air to get in. Remember when you buy your pet it will grow, so make sure that the accommodation is big enough for an adult or better still, two. A minimum floor space of 48cm X 30 cm X 30cm per rat should be provided, but the bigger the tank the better. Rats enjoy play and exercise. A secure run can be built to make this easier. It can be put outside in a sheltered spot in warm weather, but don't forget those gnawing teeth. The floor of the cage or tank should have a layer of absorbent wood shavings and material for nesting so your pet can make a bed. All soiled bedding should be removed daily, and the nest material and cage cleaned and disinfected every week. Toys are important to maintain interest. Rats enjoy wheels, but make sure it has solid sides or the tail will get trapped. Large tunnels are another good toy for rats.

### Exercise

Exercise is important so make the environment interesting and stimulating to encourage it. A wheel (with solid edges), large plastic tubes, branches and ladders all help to keep a rat healthy.

### Handling

Your new rat will be nervous, so once you have prepared the cage leave your rat alone for 24 hours to settle in and get used to the environment. Once your pet is accustomed to their new home, introduce your hand slowly allowing them to sniff you and accept your presence. Gently stroke your rat talking all the time. Slowly increase the amount of contact, but do not expect too much too soon. Once your pet is confident, they can be picked up. Before picking your pet up always check it is awake (it may bite if startled). Never pick a rat up by its tail as you could damage it permanently. A rat is best picked up by placing one hand around the shoulders, with the other hand supporting the rear. Always hold your pet close to your body. Remember your new pet will be nervous at the start so handle them for short periods until they enjoy the close contact.

### Feeding

Water should be available at all times, as an adult requires up to 80ml per day. A balanced rat food is best as too high a protein or oil level can lead to skin and other medical problems. Most food contains a variety of grains, grass, nuts and pulses. Rats should be fed twice a day, with food available at all times but care needs to be given so your pet does not become obese. Feed the same food that The McPet Shop has fed, and change diets very slowly to avoid digestive upsets. After the first few weeks you can supplement the diet with table scraps, fruit and vegetables but introduce these slowly and never give too much. Disinfect food and water bowls every week with an animal friendly disinfectant. As a rat's teeth are constantly growing wooden chews are important to maintain dental health.

### Rat Health

Rats are healthy and provided your rat is cared for properly it should live a long and healthy life. It is important to check teeth and nails every week. A rat's teeth grow continuously throughout life. If your pet is off its food or drooling saliva, have his/her teeth checked by a vet. Breathing conditions

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can be a problem, so it is important that they have plenty of ventilation in their accommodation. If your rat loses their appetite, some body weight, has runny eyes or nose, develops diarrhoea or has a poor coat or skin; seek veterinary advice.

### Your Health and Hygiene

Rats are clean animals, however, it is important to wash your hands before (so you do not frighten your pet with unusual smells) and after handling your rat (to prevent the spread of infection). Remove soiled parts of your rat's living area daily and clean the cage and sleeping area thoroughly once a week. Disinfect with a rat friendly product.

### Key Rat Facts

Weaning	4-5 weeks	Puberty	8-10 weeks
Gestation	20-23 days	Litter Size	Average of 6 to 12
Adult Weight	400-800g	Life expectancy	3 to 4 years

This Care leaflet is a basic guide only. More information is available from pet care books or the The McPet Shop guide available in the store.

### Guarantee

The McPet Shop does not guarantee the age or sex of any animal, bird or fish sold. All livestock is guaranteed for 48 hours from the time of sale. The McPet Shop aims to supply completely healthy pets. If a problem occurs within this period, then please contact the store

### *CHECK - Tick the box as you complete your task*

#### Housing

- A large **cage/tank** - taking into consideration the number of rats to be kept.
- A **pen** or wire to make a pen for the house.
- **Bedding** material for the living floor (shavings).
- **Bedding** for the sleeping box.
- **Disinfectant** to keep the cage hygienic.

#### Exercise

- A **wheel** with solid sides to stop the tail getting trapped.
- Large **tubes** to play in.
- A **ladder** to get between levels.

#### Feeding

- **Food** – A rat food, for continuity ask the staff what we have been feeding
- Food **bowl** and water **bottle**
- **Disinfectant** for feeding dishes
- **Chews/wooden block** to maintain dental health.

#### Knowledge

- **Books** to improve your pet knowledge.