

# Rat Adoption Basics



## Set Up for Success

- Basic, must-have supplies: large, multi-level cage; hammock or hide-a-way; food; water bottle; ceramic food bowl; toys; litter box and litter.
- Training and mental stimulation: food dispensing toys, play-alone toys, exercise wheel, chew toys. Consider an obstacle course; chewing and shredding toys like wood, cardboard, toilet paper, Gumabones, and Nylabones; and puzzle feeders.
- Housing: quiet, well-ventilated space; space to run around; large cage with multiple levels and minimum two cubic feet of space per rat; powder coated cage preferred.
- Bedding: paper-based bedding to absorb urine and cut down on odors. Rats can be litter box trained.
- Play and training: rats are very intelligent and easy to train. They need at least an hour outside of the cage each day to play and interact with you. Suggested play: a multi-limbed climbing fort or tunnel maze using cardboard or PVC; dig box made of dirt and sprouted grass; place frozen peas, corn, or carrots in shallow bowl with some water for rat to fish for the treats; exercise wheel at least 11 inches in diameter; train your rat to fetch, sit, shake, come when called.
- Hazards: cords, plants, unsafe hiding places (behind appliances, inaccessible places, etc.), toxic cleaning materials, poisons, open windows/doors, chewables.

## Rat Care

- Care and grooming: rats self-groom. River rocks around her food dish may help keep her nails filed down.
- Food and water: ceramic food bowl or stainless steel food dispensing toy; water bottle with filtered water.
- Daily medical check: check breathing, teeth, eyes, ears, tail, feet, movement, fur/skin color.
- Vet visits: schedule annual exams; emergency visit to the veterinarian for diarrhea, significant weight change, loss of appetite, hunched posture, swellings, skin conditions, change in coat appearance, limping, bleeding, signs of pain/sensitivity, red eyes or nose, overgrown teeth.
- Create a routine: feed the same brand of food at the same time every day. Set aside time to play with your rat in the mornings and evenings. Clean the litter box and enclosure at the same time every day. Reward your rat consistently for behaviors such as returning to her enclosure on command.

## Life with Your Rat

- Bonding: talk to your rat, hand feed, and pet your rat. Never put your fingers right in front of your rat's mouth. She may think it's food. Once your rat eats comfortably from your hand, you can begin gently petting her.
- Handling your rat: slowly and calmly approach your rat and avoid quick hand movements. Place one hand on your rat's shoulders; scoop your other hand under her rear. When putting her back down, keep a secure hold on her until very close to ground. Never lift or restrain by her tail; never reach into her resting area while she's sleeping; never stick your fingers through her cage bars.