

Rat Body Language



Nonverbal communication fascinates most of us animal lovers, and who can blame us for wanting to understand our furry friends? However, reading the body language of another species can be quite a challenge. Most of us try to translate facial expressions, body postures, tail positions, and other details that make sense in human terms—a strategy that often fails. Here's an overview to help you learn to read your rat's signals. Look for the clues provided and take into account your rat's entire body and the situation she is in—context is everything.

Happy and Content Rat

Your rat will show you that she is happy and content by using the following nonverbal cues:

- **Bruxing (Chattering):** A rat will repetitively grind her teeth together; similar to a cat purring
- **Eye Bulging (“Boggling”):** A side effect of bruxing, caused by a buildup of pressure resulting in the eyeballs bulging out of the socket
- **Ears Forward**

Fearful or Defensive Rat

Your rat will show you that she is fearful or defensive by using the following nonverbal cues:

- **Puffed Up Fur**
- **Hunched Back:** The shoulders and hind quarters are very stiff and drawn into the rat's body
- **Tail Swishing:** The tail rattles or flicks
- **Long Scream:** Intense fear
- **Short Squeaks/Long Whiny Squeaks:** Annoyed
- **Ear Twitching:** A rat's ears will twitch back and forth and shrink backward
- **Tail ‘Windmilling’:** A rat shows insecurity when her tail spins around like a windmill when picked up or put down

Sleeping Rat

Rats sleep in all kinds of different positions, mostly during the day when they are least active. Rats usually sleep for around 4 hours at a time. Sleeping positions include:

- **Rat Pile:** The most natural sleeping position for rats is in a pile with other rats to bond and share warmth.
- **Rat Ball:** Rats will sleep tucked in a ball with their heads between their legs most often when they are alone. Being tucked in a ball usually means your rat feels comfortable.
- **Pancakeing:** Rats will stretch out fully on a surface to maximize contact with a cool surface when it is warm out.
- **On Their Backs:** Most common in young rats, it is seen as a sign of trust because the rat is exposed and unprotected.
- **Head Hanging:** If you notice your rat's head is hanging over surfaces and is paired with extreme lethargy and irregular breathing, this can be a sign of a respiratory problem. Make sure to consult your veterinarian.