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## Rat Care and Facts

### Stats:

- When handled gently, rats are clean, docile, cuddly, and easily trained.
- Rats are intelligent and social and can learn tricks.
- Lifespan is 2-3 years.
- Do well living singly or in groups.
- Rats are prolific breeders with males reaching sexual maturity at 65-110 days and females at 65-110 days. The gestation period is 21-23 days.
- It is recommended to spay and neuter your rats in the first few months of life to decrease health problems and aggression between cage mates.
- Males weigh between 260-500 grams, females between 225-325 grams.
- Rats are unable to vomit and do not have a gall bladder.

### Housing:

- The bigger the better. The cage should be large enough to accommodate feeding supplies, hide boxes, nesting areas, and toys.
- Use solid bottom cages with wire sides for ventilation. Cover the cage bottom with several inches of Carefresh (crumbled soft paper). Use a cage with multiple levels.
- Temperature range needs to be 70-80° F and humidity at 45-55%.
- Add fleece pouches and houses to hide in.
- Place rodent chewing toys, tubes, wheels (no open rungs), ropes, fleece pouches, and shelves throughout the cage for exercise and play.
- Thoroughly clean the cage and change the substrate 1-2 times weekly. Rat urine is high in ammonia, which is irritating to their lungs.
- Aromatic cedar and pine shavings are not recommended. They contain resins that may be irritating to a rat's skin.
- Never put a cage in direct sunlight or in a drafty area. Diet:
- Feed a pelleted rat diet. These diets are specially balanced for your rat's digestive system. Rats require 20-27% protein for optimal health. Approximate food consumption of adult rats is 15-20 grams (less than 1 oz).
- It is not recommended to feed seeds, as seeds are high in fat, which can lead to obesity and increase the risk of mammary tumors.

- Offer fresh, clean water daily in a water bottle with a sipper tube. Approximate daily water consumption of adult rats is 22-33 mL (1-2 oz).
- Fresh fruits and vegetables in limited quantities can be offered as treats (limit to 1 tbsp. daily). Avoid gas-forming vegetables, such as broccoli or cauliflower.

#### **Common Medical Problems:**

- Obesity - Prevent with proper diet and exercise.
- Mammary Tumors - Decrease risk by spaying by 3 months of age, giving 0.2-0.4 mL of flaxseed oil daily, and limiting fat in the diet. A depot hormonal injection (Deslorelin) can also be given to decrease risk of tumor development. The best treatment is prevention, but if a tumor does develop, it is removed surgically.
- Pneumonia - Typically caused by bacteria. Signs include decreased appetite, difficulty breathing, eye and nasal discharge, which may be red, and decreased grooming. Pneumonia is treated with antibiotics and supportive care.
- Abscesses - Injuries from housing structures and cage mates can cause an abscess. These usually appear as circular lumps on the skin and may have a white center. These need to be surgically lanced.
- Lice - Most common external parasite. The lice can be seen crawling on the skin. These lice only infest rats and are easily treated.
- Kidney failure - Usually occurs in elderly rats. Signs include decreased appetite, changes in urination frequency and urine color. Treatment depends on the cause but always involves giving fluids.
- Physical examinations are recommended every 6-12 months.