

Dear adopter,

Thank you for your interest in adopting rats or mice from the laboratory. It is important to us that the rats you plan to adopt have a good life with you. You can read how to ensure this on the website of the [National Pet Information Centre](#). [The Domestic Rat Community](#) also shares a lot of information. Also watch our [video on illness and pain](#) and our [Prezi](#) on care and habituation phase.

### Conditions for adoption

- Rats are adopted in pairs of 2 or more, always in same-sex groups. For group dynamics, we recommend 3 or 4 animals.
- You have a spacious cage with plenty of climbing and hiding places and cage enrichment.
- You provide dust-free bedding (no sawdust), room temperature and sufficient ventilation.
- You change the cage at least once a week (or more often if necessary).
- You provide fresh water and suitable (fresh) food.
- You visit the vet if necessary. They deserve as much care and attention as any other pet.
- You may not breed with the rats, or use them as food/prey animals.

### Behaviour and handling

Rats are highly intelligent, friendly, loyal and playful animals that love attention from people and other rats (of the same sex). Rats are very clever and can get bored quickly. They usually enjoy learning little tricks and working out puzzles.

Always let rats come to you and never force them into human interaction (unless this is necessary to attend to the rat). Never pick up a rat by its tail! This is stressful and can be painful and cause injuries. Carefully scoop up rats with one or both hands from below, supporting their paws and belly.

### Housing

Rats are playful animals. They cover long distances, climbing and jumping. They like to live in burrows, shielded from bright light (especially albinos!) and build nests to sleep in. They therefore need a spacious environment in a not too bright place with cage enrichment that meets their behavioral needs. That means: at least a nesting box (e.g. a small box with two entrances), nesting material (unscented paper handkerchiefs or kitchen paper), climbing possibilities and hammocks. When changing the bedding, put some of the old bedding back in the cage to create a 'home' smell (this makes changing the cage less stressful).

Rats also like to run freely around the room or across the sofa and go on adventures. Make sure the room is 'rat-proof'; no cables to gnaw on or furniture to hide in. Running loose is only wise when rats come to their owners on their own accord. Rats can hide and it is stressful to catch them again.

Rats are nocturnal animals. This means that when it gets dark they are very active and make more noise. Therefore, avoid placing the cage in a bedroom. During the day they are quieter or sleep in the house. Keep at least 80x50x70 as the size for a rat cage for 2 to 3 animals. Do you have more rats? Then use this [calculator](#), for example, to see if your cage will suffice. Also consider the spacing of the bars. This should not be more than 1 cm for young animals.

### Food

Rats are true omnivores and will eat anything they are offered. This does not mean that everything is good for them. Choose a balanced diet from the pet shop and supplement it.

- Give everything in moderation: be careful with moist fruit and vegetables (risk of diarrhea).
- Occasionally some healthy, balanced leftovers from your dinner may also be allowed.
- Avoid sugars and high-fat foods like dairy and chips. Rats love sweet and fatty food, but it can cause health problems if they eat too much of it.
- In doubt? You can find several lists of suitable and unsuitable foods online.

### **Life expectancy and potential (health) problems**

Although rats are strong animals, they can get sick. We assume that the rats we offer for adoption can live up to 2 to 3 years of healthy age. In the laboratory, the animals were kept under very hygienic conditions for the purpose of research. As a result, they have had virtually no contact with germs. This means they can be extra susceptible to germs after adoption. **Especially if you combine them with existing rats in the house.** Keep a close eye on their health; Losing weight rapidly, visible lumps, an upright coat, sitting up and hardly moving are indications that something is wrong. Visit a vet if needed.

- Respiratory infection: breath sounds (growling, whistling, wheezing, etc.) and sneezing or nasal discharge.
- Tumors, cysts and abscesses: most tumors are benign and can often be surgically removed. The decision to do so should be weighed based on the size of the tumor, the age of the rat and the general health of the rat. Female rats are more susceptible to mammary tumors than males, especially as they age.
- Age: As rats age, they can develop chronic diseases such as arthritis and general health problems. It is important to have your rat evaluated by a vet if it slows down or shows other signs of disease. Many diseases of old age cannot be remedied, but they can often be treated in ways that improve the quality and quantity of life.
- Hormonal aggression: Many rats exhibit some degree of dominance. There is nothing wrong with this. Rats live in groups, in which there is usually a clear hierarchy. The more dominant a rat is, the higher it often ranks. A dominant rat does not always have to be aggressive. Sometimes male rats can be very dominant and aggressive towards other (male) rats and/or people.
- Sensitive to sound: It is now known that Lister Hooded rats can suffer from audio triggered epilepsy. Medication such as Phenoral can help with this.

### **Preventive castration and (rat expert) vet**

Having your rat neutered preventively can have a number of benefits:

- Reduced risk of health problems: Castration can lower the risk of certain health problems, such as testicular or mammary gland tumours.
- Improved interaction with other rats and/or humans: Castration can help reduce aggressive, dominant and territorial behaviour. Male and female animals can also be housed together when neutered.
- Reducing marking with urine: Non-castrated male rats tend to mark with urine to mark their territory. Castration can help reduce or even stop this behaviour.

Not every vet is equally skilled with rats. Treating a rat is different from treating a dog or cat. Fortunately, there are [many vets who do specialize](#) in this. Keep in mind (high) veterinary costs as with any pet: consultation €40 a €50, antibiotics €30 a €40, castration male €100 a €150, castration female €150 a €200 and euthanasia €50 a €70. There is a possibility to have your rat castrated at Veterinary Science Utrecht for the cost of the materials. Ask us about the possibilities.

Details about the adoptable animals are important to optimize the adoption procedure. We therefore ask for your cooperation in sharing information about the animals, especially with regard to habituation, diseases and lifespan. We regularly send out a survey for this purpose.

Pascalie van Loo  
Hoofd Instantie voor Dierenwelzijn Utrecht