

Rat Care Guidelines

Housing

Cage floor and shelves should be made of solid material to prevent damage to rats' feet/legs (i.e. not wire flooring).

The cage itself (sides/top) can be made of wire or be a fish aquarium (though wire is preferred because of improved air flow).

Cage size should be at least 14" by 12" by 24" (this would be for an adult rat, if the feeders are sent out before maturity a smaller cage size that still allows ample room for some natural behaviors may suffice).

Pine or cedar shavings should **not** be used - toxic to rats.

If wood planks are used to provide a solid floor they should be disposed of when soiled. The cage should not be made up of wood as it absorbs urine and holds on to the ammonia from the urine which can cause serious lung problems.

A sleeping box or sheltered area should be provided.

The litter should be cleaned 1 to 2 times per week with bedding removed approximately every 10 days (if there is a separate latrine and sleeping area).

Temperature must remain below 90 degrees Fahrenheit as rats can suffer from heat stroke at higher temperatures.

Food

Most appropriate food is laboratory pellets or lab blocks for the basic diet - specifically formulated to meet all of a rat's nutritional needs; rat and mouse grain mix can be fed occasionally but isn't necessarily a balanced diet; occasional fresh fruit and vegetables.

Rats need approximately 60 calories per day. The equation used to determine amount of food needed being: 5 to 6 grams (0.16 to 0.19 oz) of food per 100 grams (3.22 oz) of body weight of the rat per day. Feed consumption would be between 15 and 20 grams per day for an average adult rat. This equates to 0.48 to 0.64 ounces. As for all species, food should be adjusted to meet the individual animal's needs so it is maintained in a normal body condition. (Some sites suggested 30 to 40 grams of food per day, with some rats weighing as much as 550 grams).

Water

Preference is to use 'demand-type' water bottles vs water bowls since water bowls can be spilled or soiled by the rat. On average a rat may need 10 to 12 ml of water per 100 grams of body weight per day. For an average rat this may equal around 30 ml or 1 oz of water per day, with variation based on the individual animal's needs, the environment, and the type of feed being provided (dry feed requiring more water).

Source: Rat and Mouse Club of America