



Glenway Animal Hospital  
6272 Glenway Avenue  
Cincinnati, Ohio 45211  
**(513) 662-0224**  
[glenwaypetdocs@fuse.net](mailto:glenwaypetdocs@fuse.net)

## Frequently Asked Rat Questions

Congratulations on the arrival of your new rat! The doctors and staff of Glenway Animal Hospital are committed to making sure that your newest family member lives a long, happy, and healthy life. To help you and your rat to start out on the right foot (and paw 😊) we've put together a list of some frequently asked questions and their corresponding answers. This list is not all-inclusive so if you have additional questions please don't hesitate to contact us!

### **What are the most common types of pet rat?**

The most common types of pet rat is the brown (or Norway) rat.

### **What should I feed my rat?**

Good quality food and fresh, clean water must be readily available at all times. A well-balanced and nutritious diet based on protein with some vegetables and fruits is essential to keeping your rat healthy. You can purchase commercial rat foods that contain the appropriate amounts of nutrients (Oxbow's Healthy Handfuls). Fruits and vegetables also provide vitamins and nutrients to your rat's diet. Good sources include apples, carrots, lettuce, and bananas.

Rats should be fed once a day, generally at night since they are most active at that time. Fresh foods should be removed or changed daily to prevent spoilage. All food should be offered in a heavy ceramic crock that won't tip over. The sides of the bowl need to be high enough so bedding or feces won't get into the bowl and low enough so the rat can easily access the food. Water is commonly offered using a

water bottle equipped with a 'sipper' tube. It is important that all food and water containers be cleaned and disinfected daily.

Rat teeth grow continuously so they must have objects to gnaw on such as rawhide bones, nuts, or untreated wood pieces. This will help keep their teeth in good condition.

### **Where should I house my rat?**

Appropriate housing is critical in maintaining a healthy pet. Select a location away from direct sunlight, with good ventilation, and avoid damp areas. Drastic environmental changes need to be avoided. Rats are not as heat-tolerant as humans and should not be exposed to high temperatures. Their environment should not drop below 40 degrees either. Most rats are nocturnal, they are most active at night; keep that in mind when choosing your location.

Rats can be housed within enclosures made of durable plastic that is at least 6 inches tall. Wood cages should be avoided because they are difficult to clean and sanitize and are susceptible to destructive chewing. At least one side of the cage should be open; therefore aquariums are not suitable. Examine cages for potential hazards, escape routes, or sharp edges every time you clean. Rats need enough floor space per adult rat allowing for normal play and activity, a minimum of 16" x 10" x 10". As with other living arrangements, the more space the better for your pet's quality of life.

Solid cage floors are required. They may require a bit more effort to keep clean, but are better for your rat's health.

Rats should have hiding place for resting. Many versions of hideaway huts are available commercially, but a cardboard box works well too, is inexpensive and doubles as a chew toy. Other chew toys such as non-toxic twigs and branches, and untreated wood can be rotated for their continued chewing pleasure and dental health. Rats are curious and enjoy mazes, wheels, ladders, and mirrors.

### **What type of bedding should I use for my rat?**

Bedding materials must be clean, nontoxic, absorbent, relatively dust free, and easy to replace. Acceptable bedding includes wood shavings, shredded paper, news paper or commercial pellets (examples are Carefresh, Ecostraw or Yesterdays News). **DO NOT** use cedar shavings, as they are often implicated in causing respiratory and liver disease. Saw dust can also cause problems and should not be used. The cage should have 2 to 3 inches of bedding in it to allow the rat to burrow. Soft paper

tissues also provide bedding for them to use to make a nest. The cage should be changed at least once a week.

### **How should I handle my rat?**

Rats are curious and not easily startled, so they are great for busy, active households. You should NEVER pick your rat up by the tail. The skin covering a rat's tail is very sensitive and can slough off if they are handled by their tail. Both hands should be used to support the hinds legs and shoulders. When carrying a rat, hold him/her close to your body with your hands cupped around them.

### **Does my rat need exercise?**

Rats need plenty of exercise and they love to explore. You can construct a maze for your rat to explore and/or change ladders, tunnels, and cage wheels around to keep him/her occupied when you are unavailable. Rats can also be taught simple tricks such as coming when his/her name is called or riding around your shoulders.

### **When should my rat see a veterinarian?**

Your rat should have a full physical examination by a veterinarian familiar with this species at least every six months to detect subtle problems such as malocclusion, skin, eye, and ear abnormalities, or change in weight. A fecal specimen should be checked as well to detect for intestinal parasites. Rats are very prone to respiratory illness. Your rat should be taken to your veterinarian if you notice any changes in behavior, bathroom habits (diarrhea, constipation, or absent feces), anorexia (decreased appetite), abnormal swelling, abnormal discharge, dull/matted fur, labored breathing inactivity, hair loss or limping. As prey animals they will often hide disease states until they are quite ill, so it is important to know what is normal for your gerbil so you can detect abnormalities and have them treated quickly.

### **Does my rat need a friend?**

Rats are gentle and highly social creatures. They thrive on and enjoy the companionship of another rat (house only same gender pairs who were raised together). Rats also enjoy human interactions. Bonded pairs or family units of rats are usually affectionate with each other. Most rats get along together, however there are some things to take into consideration. Occasionally, males will fight with each other, especially in the presence of females.

Never house rats with other rodents such as gerbils, mice, or hamsters.

### **What should I do in case of emergency?**

Glenway Animal Hospital is open 7 am to 6 pm every weekday and from 8 am to 12 noon on select Saturdays. During those hours if Dr. Dornbusch Cron or Dr. Naas are not on duty the staff can refer you to other area practices that see rats. For after hour care see our emergency options handout. Emergency situations include refusal to eat or drink (this can become very serious quickly), bleeding, difficulty breathing, sudden or abnormal swelling (anywhere), abdominal distension, any sign of acute pain or distress (vocalization, hunching, straining to urinate or defecate, etc).

### **How long can I expect my rat to live?**

The average lifespan of a rat is 2-3 years. There is a lot of individual as well as breed variation, but a good quality diet and preventative medicine and care can help your rat live its life to the fullest potential.

### **For more information:**

[www.oxbowhay.com](http://www.oxbowhay.com) Premium hay, pellets, treats & supplements, information  
[www.veterinarypartner.com](http://www.veterinarypartner.com) a website run by veterinarians

### **Fun Rat facts**

The Black Plague killed more rats than people in Europe

Rat packs can be as large as 60

A rat can swim for 3 days

Rats use their tails for temperature regulation, balance, and communication

A group of rats is called a 'Mischief'

Rats get attached to their master

Those born in the Chinese Year of the Rat are believed to have characteristics such as a quick temper, fondness for gossiping, and are ambitious. (1912, 1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008)