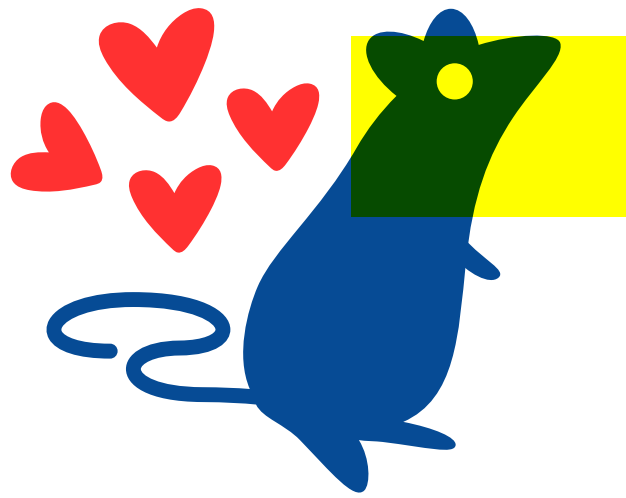




# TOP RAT CARE TIPS



Get ready for your new  
family member

# WHAT YOUR RATS COME WITH:

- Your electronic adoption pack will be emailed to you. This contains an adoption form to digitally sign and return, and any vet history.
- We do not request an official adoption fee for rats, though a donation is always appreciated. This can be made by bank card at the centre at the time of collecting your rat, or by bank transfer. Our bank details will be emailed to you as part of your adoption pack.
- We will send you away with some bedding from your rat's cage with their scent on, to help them settle in with **you.**
- Our help and guidance is available throughout the life of your new furry **friend.**

WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?



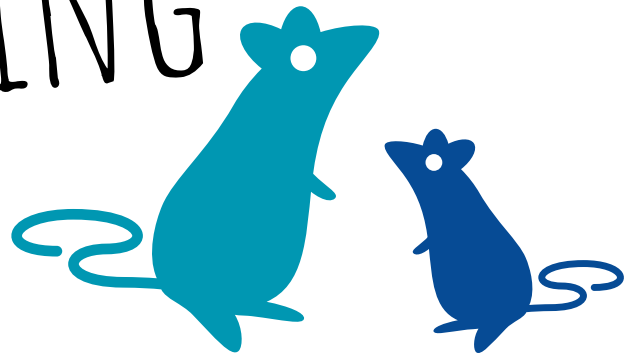
# PRIORITY TO DO LIST:

- Find and register with a small animal and exotics specialist vet now. This can normally be done over the phone without taking your rat/s.
- Check you have all the items on our **Rat Shopping List.**
- Send us photos of your proposed set-up, including photos of the cage with the cage furniture/enrichment items, and any free roaming areas.
- Send proof of ID, e.g. a copy of your driver's licence, or passport, to [adoptions@rspca-manchesterandsalford.org.uk](mailto:adoptions@rspca-manchesterandsalford.org.uk)



# RAT SHOPPING

## LIST



### Cage

- Ferplast Furat Plus**  
Suitable for 4 baby rats (pups) or 2 adults.
- PetPlanet Rat & Ferret Cage**  
Suitable for up to 6 does or 4 bucks.  
Or cage with same or bigger measurements.

### Cage accessories

- Beds – Sputniks, hammocks, huts.
- Wheel.
- Litter tray.
- Bridges, perches, platforms.
- Natural fibre ropes
- Natural fibre cargo nets
- Gnawing items - wooden chew sticks, lava ledges, willow balls.
- Extras - toilet roll tubes, tissue boxes (with any plastic removed) etc.

### Out and about

- Pet carrier, ideally with top opening (avoid fabric designs).

### Materials for cage

- Substrate for bottom of cage.
- Nesting material.
- Litter for litter trays.  
See next page for details on each.

### Food stuff

- Small ceramic bowl per rat for food, unless you are scatter feeding.
- Non-porous plastic or glass drinking bottle per rat, for water.
- A complete pellet diet specifically formulated for rats, such as Science Selective.
- Fruits and vegetables to supplement the pellet diet. **See page 10 for a list of rat-friendly fruit and vegetables.**

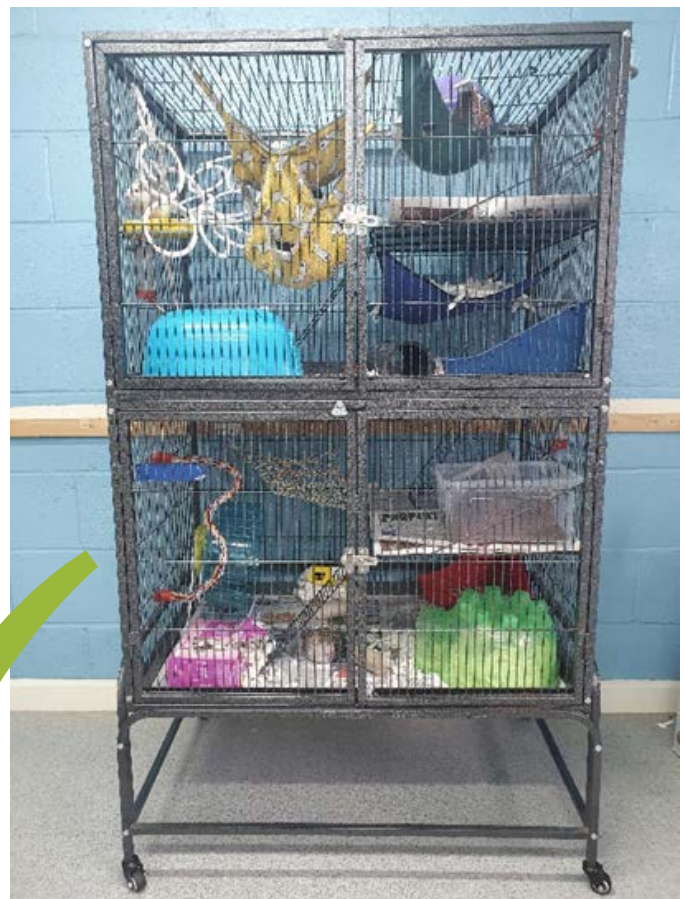
# SETTING UP YOUR CAGE



Rats are highly social and active animals, and their cages need to allow enough space for social behaviours (including play), exercise, and enrichment. Wooden cages, hutches, tanks and cages without solid floors aren't suitable for our ratty friends.

**Cages we recommend:**

**Ferplast Furat Plus (L) and PetPlanet Rat & Ferret Cage (R)**



**Top tip:** Rats can squeeze through tiny gaps. Young or smaller rats need min. bar spacing of 1.5cm. Add metal mesh to your cage if the bars are smaller than this (not chicken wire!)

# SUBSTRATE, NESTING MATERIAL & LITTER

## KNOW THE DIFFERENCE!

### 1. Substrate lines the base of the cage

Digging and burrowing are natural behaviours for rats, and they enjoy having a deep layer of substrate (>2cm) to walk on and forage through.



*Some suitable options:*

- Newspaper (with any staples removed).
- Shredded paper (e.g. teabag bedding).
- Shredded cardboard (e.g. Finacard, Green Mile).
- Paper fibre bedding (e.g. Carefresh, Fitch).



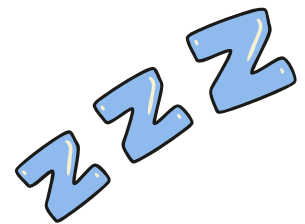
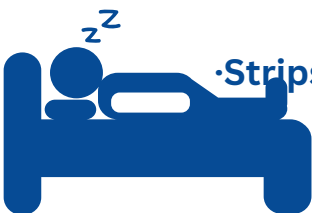
### 2. Nesting material for sleeping areas

Rats – does especially – really enjoy building nests, and it makes their sleeping areas much more comfortable and secure. Nesting material should be provided in sleeping areas such as Sputniks and cardboard boxes.

**Additional nesting materials can be left around the cage for added enrichment, for rats to find and add to their nests themselves. This way they can control their microclimate.**

*Some suitable options:*

- Paper bedding (e.g. Safebed paper wool).
- Strips of kitchen roll.
- Good quality, dust-free hay.
- Strips of newspaper (with any staples removed).



**Top tip:** Fluffy, cotton wool type bedding (typically sold for hamsters) should never be used, as this can cause issues if ingested, or if it gets wrapped around limbs. Knitted and crocheted blankets are similarly unsuitable and best avoided..



### 3. Litter for the litter trays

Rats are naturally clean animals, and can learn to use a litter tray. This can then be cleaned regularly and helps to reduce bacterial and ammonia build-up in the cage, as well as control odour. The litter should be a different material to the cage substrate, so rats can tell the difference between their litter tray and the rest of their cage floor.

#### *Some suitable options:*

- Paper pellet litter (e.g. back 2 nature, Breeder Celect, Papelit).
- Wooden cat litter.

Clay and corn litter, as well as anything scented, should be avoided.

## CAGE ACCESSORIES

Your ratties need lots of enrichment! Each cage should include:

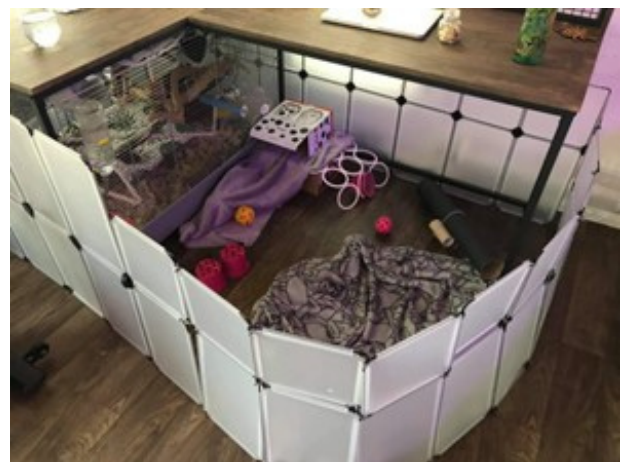
- Water bottles (one per rat, to prevent resource-guarding) positioned around the cage.
- Beds/nesting boxes (one per rat) – e.g. Sputniks, hammocks, huts. Beds should have more than one entrance/exit, to prevent rats from being trapped inside by other rats.
- A wheel, securely attached to the side of the cage. Wheels should be as large as possible, and rats should be able to use them with straight backs to prevent spinal pain or injury. For adults the minimum diameter is 12 inches, and larger bucks may need wheels of 14 to 16 inches (Tic Tac Wheels are ideal). Wheels should be a solid material (i.e. no rungs).
- A variety of bridges, platforms, and natural fibre ropes, to encourage climbing and to make maximum use of cage space.
- A litter tray (one is enough for two rats. Larger groups should have two or more).

# FREE ROAMING RATS

Rats are intelligent, social animals who love to explore new things!

A good way of improving your rats' welfare, both psychologically and physiologically, is to give them plenty of time out of their cage, interacting with you and exploring a safe environment. A designated play area is perfect for this!

A play area can contain items not usually found in their main cage, to engage rats' interest, and allow them to express behaviours they might not be able to in their cage.



## Possible free range items include:

- Water trays (try floating some frozen peas in the water – rats love pea fishing!).
- Dig boxes (coconut fibre soil in a waterproof storage box is perfect).
- Ladders.
- Tunnels.
- Toilet roll tubes.
- Blankets.
- Natural fibre ropes.
- Cat towers.
- Heat-treated branches from edible/fruit trees.
- Alternative substrates.
- Toys the rats do not always have access to, which remain novel and exciting.



**Top tip:** Make sure play areas are secure and regularly cleaned. Always have food, water, a litter tray and covered places for your rat to hide when they come out to play!



# HANDLING TIME!

- The best way to pick up a rat is to scoop with one hand under the chest, while the other hand supports the bottom. Make sure to hold your rat securely, with your hand around **its** chest and its weight supported, otherwise it might panic and struggle.
- If a rat feels insecure when held it will ‘windmill’ its tail in an effort to regain balance.
- Rats have poor eyesight and are easily startled. Make sure to talk to your rat gently as you approach it, to let it know that you are there.



**Top tip:** Never pick up your rat or try and restrain them by their tail!

# FEEDING TIME

Fresh fruits and vegetables are an important part of a rat's **diet**. They can have a small portion each day, in addition to their balanced pellet food.

**Not all fruit and vegetables are equally good for our rats.** It is easy to cause problems by feeding too much starchy veg or sugary fruit, just as it is over-feeding treats. As such it is important to feed a balanced diet, with a wide variety of fruit and vegetables (favouring particularly leafy greens and herbs).

Rats enjoy and benefit from a diet supplemented by daily portions of:

- **Leafy greens (including herbs)**
- **Legumes**
- **Colourful veg**
- **Fruit**

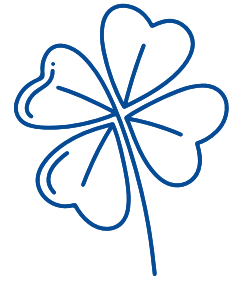
These can be fed as a chopped-up mix all in one go, or you can alternate what you feed across different nights of the week.

 A daily portion of fresh fruit/veg should be around the size of the rat's head.



See the next page for a list of good examples of rat-safe fruit and veg!

# LIST OF RAT FOODS



## Leafy greens and herbs

- Basil
- Coriander
- Collard Greens
- Clover
- Cress
- Dandelion leaves
- Fennel
- Kale
- **Lettuce**
- Mint
- Pak choi
- Parsley
- Rocket
- Savoy cabbage
- Spring greens
- Spinach
- Swiss chard

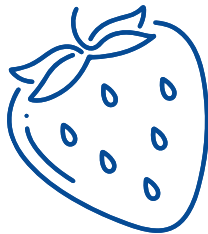
## Other veg

- Artichoke
- Asparagus
- Aubergine
- **Avocado (stone and skin removed)**
- Bamboo shoots
- Beetroot
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Butternut squash
- Carrot
- Cauliflower
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Courgette
- Marrow
- Mushroom
- Okra
- Parsnip
- Pepper/capsicum
- **Potato (cooked)**
- Pumpkin
- Radish
- Red cabbage
- Swede
- Sweetcorn
- Sweet potato
- Turnip

## Legumes

Beans should be fed soaked or cooked, not dried

- Bean sprouts
- Broad beans
- Cannellini beans
- Chickpeas
- Haricot beans
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Mange tout
- Mung beans
- Garden peas
- Runner beans
- Soya beans/edamame
- Sugar snap peas



## Fruit

Too much fruit should be avoided due to the sugar content.

Citrus fruits and mango contain high levels of de-limonene and should not be fed to **bucks.**

- Apple (pips removed)
- Apricot (stone removed)
- Banana
- Blackberries
- Blackcurrants
- Blueberries
- Cherries (stone removed)
- Coconut
- Cranberries
- Cucumber
- Dates
- Figs
- Kiwi
- Melon
- Nectarine (stone removed)
- Papaya
- Passion fruit
- Peach (stone removed)
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Plum (stone removed)
- Pomegranate seeds
- Raspberries
- **Rhubarb (cooked)**
- Strawberries
- Tomato

### Choose a mix of:

Leafy greens (including herbs)

· Legumes

· Colourful veg

· Fruit



# VET STUFF

It's important to register with a 'rat savvy' vet straightaway!



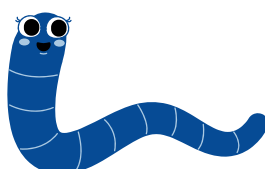
## Some common health issues in rats **are:**

- Respiratory infections.
- Urinary tract infections.
- Abscesses.
- Benign tumours (e.g. most mammary tumours, pituitary gland tumours).
  - Cancerous tumours (e.g. Zymbal's gland tumours).
  - Kidney issues.
  - Congestive heart failure.
  - Hind leg degeneration.

Rats do not need vaccinations, or preventative flea and worm treatment.

Rats can still catch parasites, and these must be treated.

Rats can catch fleas, lice, mites, worms etc.  
Please consult your vet for treatment!



# HOW TO HEALTH CHECK YOUR RAT



It's important to do regular health checks at home on your rats. This will help you spot any issues and get vet treatment ASAP if needed.

## Before picking your rat up...

Greet your rat as normal. Do they seem bright, alert and curious?

They should not seem lethargic or disinterested. A rat sitting hunched up with puffed-up fur may be in pain. Check that your rat is not breathing more quickly than normal.

Watch your rat's movement in the cage. Check for any limping, flat-footedness, or lack of coordination (such as circling or stumbling).

## Head



1. Eyes should be clear and bright, with no squinting, cloudiness or swelling. Please note that rats naturally secrete a red-brown pigment from their tear glands and nose called porphyrin. There should not be excessive porphyrin discharge around the eyes or nose. (A small amount if a rat has just woken up is normal, but the rat should quickly groom this off. If porphyrin persists there may be a problem).

2. Ears should be clean inside, and not crusty or ragged. There should be no discharge.

3. Check their teeth are the same length, opaque, and a uniform colour (typically yellow-orange. Top and bottom teeth often differ in colour, but should be matching in their pairs). Mouths should be pink, with no excessive drooling.

4. Swelling around the cheeks or mouth may be a dental abscess. The Zymbal's gland is located just in front of a rat's ear, and tumours here are, while not common, generally very aggressive.

5. Check the underside of the throat for any swelling around the jaw. Both sides should be even. The glands under the throat can become swollen when an infection is present. It is also a common place for abscesses.

6. Hold your rat up beside your ear to listen to its breathing. Noisy breathing can indicate a respiratory infection.

## Skin and fur



1. Feel down the length of the body for any scratches or cuts. Smooth down the fur. Any fur that continues to stick up or lie oddly should be checked, as this can often hide scratches or minor wounds.

2. Fur that looks dull, 'dandruffy' or particularly greasy/coarse can indicate issues. These could be dietary or hormonal, or can point to the presence of lice or mites. Please note that bucks often have a small amount of yellow/orange 'buck grease' on their skin, which is normal.

3. Part the fur to give a clear view of the hair shaft. Look for tiny orange rods or white dots which may be lice or lice eggs.

## Legs and feet



1. Gently turn your rat onto its back and check its legs and feet for any swelling, heat, or redness which could indicate a sprain or break.

2. The skin of the feet should not be dry, cracked, or red.



**Top tip: Rats may sneeze occasionally but this shouldn't be frequent.**

## Body



1. Stroke your rat all over, gently rolling the skin between your fingers to feel for any lumps. Rats are particularly prone to mammary tumours and abscesses, which grow quickly so it's good practice to check for them so you can get treatment if they appear.

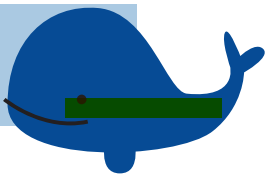
2. In male rats check the area just above the groin, running your finger over to check for any swelling or unevenness where the preputial glands are located (a common place for abscesses in bucks).

Check testicles for uniformity of size, shape and colour, and any heat which might indicate an infection or lump forming.

3. Older bucks may struggle to bend and groom their penises properly, which can lead to the formation of 'penis plugs' – a build-up of cellular debris which can block the urethra, and will need gently removing.

4. In female rats check the groin area (especially between the groin and tail base where mammary tumours are common) for any unevenness, and check for any discharge or smell from the vagina.

## Tail



1. Stroke down the length of the rat's tail. There should be no bumps or kinks. Scales should all face in the same direction, and not lift up!



**Top tip:** Unsure if your rat is unwell? Always speak to your vet if you are unsure!

# GOT A QUESTION



Our team are very knowledgeable of rat welfare and behaviour, if you have a query they are here to help! It doesn't matter how long ago you adopted from us.

Contact us:

[admin@rspca-manchesterandsalford.org.uk](mailto:admin@rspca-manchesterandsalford.org.uk)

## SOCIALS

We love to hear about ex-residents in their new homes, share your pictures with us on Facebook and Insta:

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