

## Caring For Your Pet Rodent

Rodents are unique pets because of their small stature, and they require special care. Here are some tips on how to house and feed your pet rodent to give it a long happy and healthy life.

### **Housing-**

Most pet rodents feel at home in a 10-20 gallon aquarium or cage that are designed specifically for rodents. You want to avoid wooden cages because rodents like to chew and you don't want an escapee running around your house. You also should avoid wire bottom cages because your rodent could get their feet stuck in the wires and cause injury to themselves. Rodents love to burrow, make sure you supply plenty of hiding places in the cage. Card board paper towel or toilet paper rolls work perfect for a hiding space. Keep in mind your pet will chew through these quickly and will need to be replaced weekly.

### **Temperature and Ventilation-**

An average temperature for a rodent cage should be between 65 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Higher temperatures can cause heat stress. Always make sure the aquarium or cage is well-ventilated and draft-free.

### **Bedding material-**

There are a few good choices for bedding for your rodent. A few ideas for bedding would be to use shredded paper towel, pelleted paper products, oat hulls, wheat grass, or wood shaving (other than pine and cedar). Pine and cedar are commonly used because they smell good, but they are not recommended because they may cause health problems. Some problems may include allergies and rashes. You should try to avoid sawdust, sand, and dirt because they are harder to keep clean. Whichever materials you decide to use make sure it gets cleaned at least once a week to prevent illness. When cleaning the cage make sure to empty everything even old food and clean the cage well. Replace the cage with fresh bedding, water and food and consult with your veterinarian for any specific recommendations.

### **Toys-**

Cage toys are a good source of exercise and stimulation for your pet rodent. Tubes and mazes are commonly used as well as exercise wheels. Plastic wheels with no openings are safest for your pet. Make sure to clean cage toys once a week with soap and water or diluted bleach, and rinse thoroughly.

### **Multiple-pet housing-**

It is best to house rodents by themselves to prevent aggressiveness, unwanted breeding, and cannibalism of the young. If you must keep two rodents together keep the following in mind:

1. A male and female will most likely mate if housed together, especially if they were paired young.

2. Different species should never be housed together because one species may carry an infectious disease that could be fatal for the other. For example, rabbits may carry bacteria that can kill a guinea pig.
3. If a pet rodent has been housed alone for most of its life don't introduce a new pet they are likely to fight. One exception to this is breeding animals.

Here is a general guideline for housing certain species together:

**Guinea Pigs-** they could be housed together in necessary

**Hamsters-** They are best housed alone. Adult females are very aggressive to other females and males.

**Mice-** Male mice a best alone, but could be housed with other males if done when they are weaned. Female mice rarely fight and can be housed together.

**Rats-** Rats that have been housed since they were weaned rarely fight. Females with young may fight with other females.

**Gerbils-** Gerbils should usually be housed alone. If a male and female bond before 8 weeks, they may form a pair and breed together for life. Pairs should never be separated.

### **Diet-**

About 85% to 90% rodent's diet should be rodent pellets. The rodent party mix should not be used as a sole diet. It contains 50% or more nuts and seeds, these contain low amounts of protein and high amounts of fat. Although, nuts and seeds can be offered as treats it should be no more than 5% of your rodent's diet. You can also feed small amounts of clean fresh fruits and vegetables. Yellow and orange vegetables are best to feed. A handful of hay or grass daily is a good source of fiber. Depending on the size of the rodent a small handful would be better. Food should be offered in a heavy, spill-proof ceramic bowl or in feeders attached to the cage. Fresh water should always be available 24 hours a day in a sipper tube or spill proof bowl.

If you are a guinea pig owner keep in mind they need an supplemental source of vitamin C because they cannot produce it on their own. They should only be fed guinea pig pellets which are supplemented with vitamin C. Keep in mind that the nutritive value of vitamin C disappears from the pellets within 90 days of bagging. This 90 days is not from when you buy it. Along with the food you should always add vitamin C to their water source just to make sure they are getting enough each day. You can also supplement with fresh vegetables such as kale, broccoli, dandelion greens, and small amounts of cabbage.

### **Important information-**

Rodents can hide their illnesses very well. Once you see a problem get them to the veterinarian as soon as you can. Usually once you notice a problem it most likely has been going on for a couple days to weeks. It is very important to watch your rodent very well every day and at the first sign of a problem get them in for an examination.

| Species     | Life expectancy (years) | Average Weight (grams) | Breeding Age (days) | Gestation (days) |
|-------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Guinea Pigs | 4-8                     | 750                    | 90-150              | 59-72            |
| Hamsters    | 1-3                     | 125                    | 48-56               | 15-18            |
| Mice        | 1-3                     | 40                     | 42-49               | 17-21            |
| Rats        | 1-3                     | 350                    | 90-110              | 20-22            |
| Gerbils     | 2-4                     | 90                     | 70-90               | 24-26            |

