



## RAT CARE GUIDE: HEALTH

### GENERAL INFO

**Annual Exam:** It is important to take your rat to the veterinarian for an annual exam to ensure your rat is in good health. Rats do not require vaccines.

Rats control their temperature through their tails and the soles of their paws. **Try to maintain a room temperature of between 65–75 degrees Fahrenheit and a humidity of between 30–70%.**

### GENERAL SIGNS OF ILLNESS

- Any behavioral change
- Lethargy
- Defensive aggression
- Disinterested in treats
- Changes in eating or drinking
- Disinterested in interacting with you
- Poor coat quality

**Lifespan:** Two to three years.

**Reproduction:** Rats become sexually mature and are able to reproduce at four weeks of age. It is possible to spay and neuter rats but most people choose to keep them intact and house them with the same gender instead. Surgery on small animals is always risky, particularly a complex surgery such as a spay. Talk to your veterinarian to see what option is right for you and your rat.

### COMMON ISSUES

#### Upper Respiratory Infection

Most rats carry mycoplasma, which is the organism that most often leads to URI (upper respiratory infection) and pneumonia. Some rats can carry this without ever showing symptoms. Others will suffer from infections on and off throughout their lives, most often brought on by stress. It is very important to watch for signs of illness. Rats will try to hide illness for as long as they possibly can, meaning by the time you notice any symptoms, they may have been ill for a while. It is important to get treatment as soon as possible.

#### Mites

If your rat is excessively scratching and/or you notice sores on your rat's skin, particularly around the shoulders, neck, and ears, your rat may have mites. Your veterinarian will do a skin scraping to look for mites under the microscope. Mites are easily treated with a prescribed pesticide such as Ivermectin. If no mites are found, your rat may have allergies to bedding, food, or detergent.

#### Tumors

Unfortunately rats are prone to tumors as they age, especially females. Tumors in rats are usually benign and can be surgically removed. Your veterinarian will be able to tell you if this is possible. If your rat is over 2 years old, surgery may not be the best option. Surgery and anesthetic can

be rough on older rats, and the risk to your rat starts to increase. If you don't opt for removal, rats can live with benign tumors for several months, however it does eventually take its toll as the tumor grows. If your rat is no longer able to move around on its own due to a tumor, or is no longer interested in eating or drinking and surgery is not an option, it may be time to consider humane euthanasia.

Abscesses are also common in rats, and can be treated with a round of antibiotics and/or lancing the abscess.

