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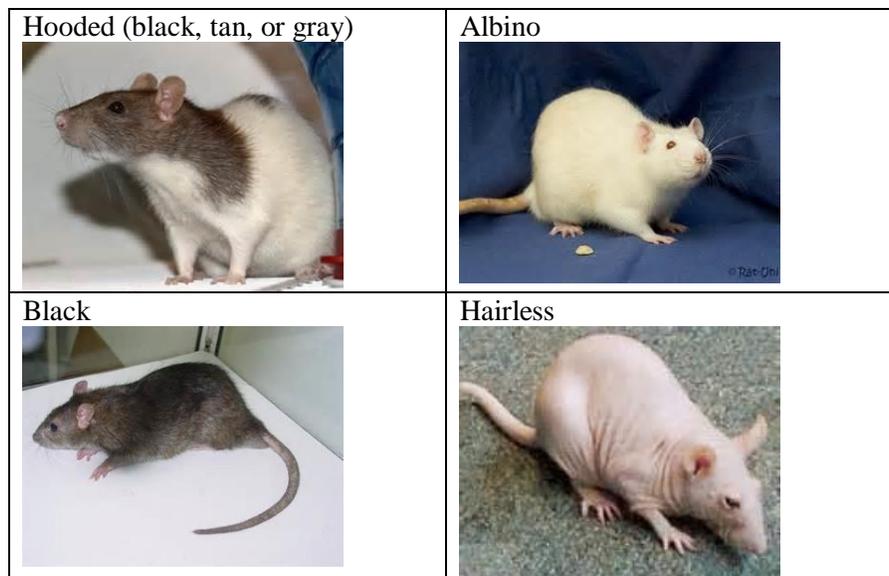
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## CARING FOR YOUR RAT

Rats make great pets and are easily cared for. They are friendly, social and intelligent and will rarely bite if raised with people. The average life expectancy is 2-3 years with good care. Female rats tend to be more active and inquisitive than males. The following information can help you in your decision to have a rat as a pet.

### Brief history:

Rats originated in Asia and have been commingling with humans for several thousand years. The domestication of rats began in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They were first used as a food source or as entertainment. Laboratories began using rats in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and were selectively breeding rats for temperament and coat color. The laboratory rat was introduced to the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. People started keeping rats as pets at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rats come in a variety of colors.



### Housing:

Rats can be kept in a wide variety of housing with very few limitations on style.

- The cage should be at least 18 X 24 inches for one rat
- It should provide good ventilation but have an area for the rat to be protected from drafts
- Constructed of chew proof materials
- Provide a wood or cardboard box for a nest
- Some rats will use an exercise wheel.

Use a minimum of 1½ inches of soft bedding on the bottom of the cage. Ground paper bedding is best but you can also use birch, aspen or alder shavings. Do NOT use cedar or pine as these can contain toxic oils. Rats are natural chewers and enjoy toys such as cardboard tubes to chew on. They do not require hard wood for chewing and should not be given hard wood as this can damage their teeth.

Rats should be monitored closely when out of their cage as their curiosity can get them into trouble.

**Feeding:**

Rats are opportunistic eaters and will eat anything available. However, in order to give your rat the best chance at a long healthy life, there are a few dietary guidelines that should be followed.

- Always provide fresh water, a ball-valve water bottle works best.
- The majority of the diet should be a commercially prepared pelleted rat food. These are very nutritious and contain the proper balance of nutrients.
- Avoid seeds and nuts as these are nutritionally poor and cause obesity.
- Offer small amounts of treats such as fruits and vegetables, low fat cheese, and cereals.
- Salt licks are not needed.

**Handling:**

Rats are typically very social pets and like being held and interacted with. However, there are a few important safety tips to keep in mind when holding your pet rat.

- Rats do not have a very good sense of vision and explore their world through smell. It is normal for rats to be sniffing at your hands when they are being held and doesn't mean they are about to bite.
- Wash your hands thoroughly prior to handling your rat to remove any odors from predators (dogs and cats) or food, this will decrease the likelihood of your rat trying to nibble on your fingers.
- Never hold your pet rat by the tail.

**Routine Care:**

Rats are prone to heat stress and should be kept at an ideal temperature of 64-79° F and a humidity of 30-70%. Cages should be kept clean to prevent ammonia buildup. Excess ammonia fumes can damage your rat's lungs.

**Behavior and Socialization:**

Rats are very social and can be housed singly or in groups if compatible. Rats grouped together will often nest together and pile on top of each other in a corner of their enclosure. Some rats may not be accepted into the group and will sleep alone. Male rats may occasionally vocalize and jump at each other, this seldom results in injury and is usually quickly forgotten.

If your pet rat is displaying any of the following behaviors or symptoms, we recommend a health exam.

- Decreased grooming, this is usually indicated by a red discharge around eyes and nose.
- Appearance of any lumps or growths
- Rough hair coat or spiky look
- Difficulty moving around
- Hunched back
- Decreased appetite
- Drooling
- Any change from normal behavior