**Rat Care Sheet**

**Lifespan:** 3 years

**Housing**

A wire cage with a removable tray is a great home for your rat as it is easy to clean and provides plenty of ventilation. Rats love to explore and climb so the more room they have, the happier they will be! Generally the number of levels in a cage indicates how many rats you can keep in it. The bottom of the cage can be lined with newspaper, but for better odour control a wood or paper based kitty litter works best. If there is wire flooring in your cage it is best to remove it as small feet can easily be trapped and the wire flooring can be hard to clean. Sawdust and shavings should be avoided as it might cause respiratory problems in your pet rat.

Always have a hide-away, an area for your rat to retreat to and feel safe ... a small house is ideal! Rats also like to make ‘nests’ and shredded paper and tissues make good bedding.

Your rat's enclosure should be cleaned regularly. Twice a week is best as it prevents odours and is more hygienic for your rat. Make sure to only leave your rat out of the cage while it is supervised.

**Food**

There are numerous brands of rat food available and the choice can be daunting. At Pet Magic we sell own "Rat Mix" or "Rat Pellets". Both options are nutritionally balanced, however the mix contains more variety. Rats love to eat, but an empty dish doesn't mean all the food is gone. Before refilling the dish, check hiding places, as your rat will often store food in these areas.

Fresh water is a must, and should be in a bottle to help keep it clean.

Rats love their treats and it is important that you give them treats from the list below and avoid all unsafe food.

**SAFE:** apple, pear, strawberry, broccoli, cauliflower, celery, capsicum, carrot, orange, Chinese greens, sprouts, dog or cat biscuits, cooked chicken

**AVOID:** cheese, beetroot, rhubarb, oxalis, potato, lettuce, tomato, cucumber, eggplant, beans, onions, cabbage

**Enrichment**

Rats are social animals so it is a great idea to get two or more. They are fun to watch in groups as they tend to be more active when playing. It is best to purchase your rats at the same time, as often when introduced later they may fight. If this does happen, coating the new and old rats with baby powder may help. Rats are also happy to be kept on their own, particularly males. Only keep males and females together if you want them to breed.

Not all rats play on wheels, but for those who do it is great exercise and entertainment. Metal or plastic wheels are both easy to clean. Rats love to swim! In summer, a sink with shallow water is a great place for supervised play.
Mineral stones and wood chews make fun toys for your rat and also help to keep their teeth filed down while aiding in nutrition.

It is important to supervise young children while they are handling their rat, as an uncomfortable rat will bite if necessary.

**Grooming**
Rats need little grooming and a healthy rat will groom themselves regularly. You can bathe your rat using a good quality Small Animal Shampoo ensuring that you only wash them once a month.

The teeth of your rat will grow all the time. Because of this your rat will need to chew on mineral stones and wood chews.

**Breeding**
A female rat can fall pregnant at 8 weeks of age. For the health and enhanced longevity of your rat, it's best to not to breed them until they are 16 weeks of age (4 months). Gestation is usually 4 weeks with 8 babies often born. A female rat can fall pregnant again within 12 hours of giving birth. The father can become stressed around his babies and may kill them as a result so it is best to remove him.

During and after pregnancy make sure you give the mother plenty of fruit, vegetables and extra vitamin supplements. Weaning occurs at around 5 weeks of age with the babies able to go to new homes once they turn 6 weeks old.

Note: A female rat may have up to 12 litters a year if not controlled!

**Health - "Prevention is the Best Cure"**
Rats need to be wormed every 3 months. Pet Magic uses Aristopet® Small Animal Wormer. Administering the wormer is easy, as rats love the taste. Put a small amount of worming syrup in a crumb of bread and leave the crumb in the cage over night.

Rats need to be treated against mite and lice every 6 weeks. Pet magic uses Aristopet® Small Animal Mite and Lice Spray. A small spray on each rat in the cage is necessary and at the same time be sure to spray the cage and hide-aways you may have as well. Remove any food or water bowls and DO NOT spray them. If a rat is not treated regularly they can become infected with mange, which is painful and needs veterinary attention.