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HOUSING YOUR PET RODENT

What type of cage does my pet rodent require?

It is most convenient to house pet rodents in a glass aquarium, although cages are available specifically for these pets. Wooden cages are not suitable as rodents love to chew and can really destroy their homes. The cages can be left open at the top providing that the pet can't escape and other pets (such as the family dog or cat) can't get to the pocket pet. **ALL PET RODENTS ARE MASTERS OF ESCAPE.** The cages must be escape-proof. Letting a pet rodent have free run of the house is DISCOURAGED, due to the potential for injury and death to the pet, as well as to destruction of furniture by the pet. They can be handled outside of the cage if care is used (supervise young children). The environmental temperature should be kept between 65 ° and 85 ° F (18 ° - 29 ° C); warmer temperatures predispose pet rodents, especially guinea pigs, to heat stroke.



My pet seems lonely. Can I house more than one rodent in each cage?

While it is most common to have a single or occasionally a pair of animals, several generalities can be made regarding group housing:

1. If a male and female are housed together, especially if they were paired at an early age, mating will occur.
2. Never house opposite species in the same cage (i.e., a rat and a mouse).
3. Some species should not be housed in the same area (such as rabbits and guinea pigs), as one species may carry an infectious organism that could be fatal to another species.
4. If a pet rodent has been housed alone, it is best not to introduce a new friend to it, as fighting is likely to occur.

Guinea Pigs

Guinea Pigs can be housed together. Sometimes they fight when they are put together but you should let them sort out their pecking order. This may take a couple of days. Sometimes guinea pigs will continue to squeak at one another intermittently and appear to be aggressive. Do not worry they are just re-establishing the pecking order.

Hamsters

Hamsters are best housed individually. Sexually mature females are aggressive to other females and to males.

Mice

Male mice are usually housed alone. Female mice rarely fight and are often housed together. Newly assembled male groups, new males entering established territories, and mice previously housed alone are more likely to fight.

Rats

Unlike mice, rats rarely fight and can be housed in groups. Occasionally, females that have just given birth may fight with other females.

Gerbils

Gerbils are usually housed individually. A monogamous pair can be formed if the male and female are bonded before 8 weeks of age. The pair should not, as a rule, be separated.

Does my pet rodent need bedding in his cage?

Wood shavings, such as pine or cedar, are usually provided for bedding material. Shredded paper or towels are also fine. Avoid sawdust, sand, or dirt. The cage should be cleaned and the bedding changed as often as it gets dirty, but at least weekly. A major cause of respiratory disease in pet rodents is poor environmental ventilation, which allows ammonia from the urine to build up and irritate the pet's airways. A frequently cleaned, well-ventilated environment is important in controlling respiratory infections. Any toys should be cleaned weekly as well.

Can I give our pet any toys?

Regarding cage toys, these can provide psychological stimulation as well as exercise for the pet rodents. Tubes and mazes are popular, as are exercise wheels. "Open track" exercise wheels, can be dangerous. Pet rodents, especially hamsters, can easily become injured by getting a foot trapped in the wheel. Leg amputation is required to treat hamsters with severe foot injuries (humane euthanasia is also an option). While not every animal with an exercise wheel will be injured, it is a risk best avoided. The safest wheel is composed of plastic and has no openings in the track ("solid track") where a foot can get caught.



What else do I need in the cage?

Since rodents like to burrow, it is recommended to provide some type of hiding place for them in the cage. Round, hollow objects can be purchased at the pet stores, or cleaned cans (such as an orange juice can) or paper towel cardboard rolls can be provided. If using a can, be sure there are no exposed metal pieces that can cause injury; with paper towel or toilet paper rolls, expect the pet will probably chew these up rather quickly, so they will need to be replaced fairly often.

Anything else I need to know?

Pet rodents are very sensitive to heat stroke. It is critical to keep their environmental temperature at or below 85° F (29° C), and make sure their "house" is well ventilated.

*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM
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