



# Tompkins County SPCA

## The Pet Lover's Guide to Your New Mouse, Rat, or Guinea Pig

*Rodents are curious, affectionate, and entertaining pets. They don't take up much space, and they can be compatible with a busy lifestyle. Following are some basic tips to keep your new pet happy and healthy.*

### What You'll Need

- Cage or other suitable habitat
- Bedding (CareFresh litter, clean hay, or shredded newspaper)
- Food dish
- Water dispenser
- Nest box
- Toys and items for climbing

### Your Pet's New Home



You will need a cage, Habitrail-type habitat, or a ten-gallon or larger aquarium. Because your pet will spend so much time in his enclosure, it is important to buy the largest you can fit and afford. Cage wires should be spaced no wider than 1/2 inch. Aquariums should have a tightly fitting screen top.

Rodents should not stand on bare wire as it can cause foot problems. Line the bottom of the cage with some folded newspaper on top of which you place shredded newspaper, CareFresh litter, or clean hay. Do not use pine or cedar shavings as these can cause respiratory and liver problems.

Rats, mice, and guinea pigs all need an appropriately sized box to use as a hiding place and sleeping area.

How often you change the cage will depend on how large it is (the smaller the cage, the faster it gets dirty), what kind it is (aquariums and Habitrails have less ventilation), and how many animals you have. Generally speaking, bedding should be changed *at least* 1-2 times per week, and the enclosure washed every 2-4 weeks. Do not use bleach, strong-smelling, or toxic products. Soap and water or Nature's Miracle will work fine. Rinse well and dry completely.

### Environmental Enrichment

All rodents require mental stimulation and physical exercise. And since they will be living in a fairly confined space, it is important to give them plenty of things to do. Simple items like toilet paper tubes for mice and short mailing tubes for rats and guinea pigs can provide hours of entertainment. Mice like exercise wheels, most rats do not, some guinea pigs do. Try bird ladders for climbing, empty tissue boxes to hide in, chewing blocks made for rodents, and shred-a-beds. Ferret hammocks

or cloth tied to the edges of the cage are also nice for rats and mice. Use your imagination, and soon you'll learn what your pet likes best.

Like all animals, rodents need exercise, and that usually means time out of their cage. Mice can run in exercise balls, but be sure to supervise. You can also set up an area with barriers around it, put the wheel or nest box in the play area, and let your pet explore. Do not leave rodents out of their cage when dogs or cats are around, and do not leave them unsupervised.

### **Food**

You can buy a variety of prepared foods at the pet supply store. These should be supplemented with fresh foods each day. Offer small amounts of raw and cooked veggies, cooked pasta, crackers, and cooked grains and beans. Do not feed sugar, dairy, eggs, or meat. Serve nuts and seeds in small amounts as treats only.



Guinea pigs cannot manufacture their own Vitamin C, so they require a supplement, usually added to their water (see your veterinarian or pet supply store for the proper kind). Foods like broccoli, kale, oranges, cilantro, and parsley are high in Vitamin C and one of these should also be provided daily.

Clean, fresh water should be available at all times.

### **Companionship and Socializing**

Rats, mice, and guinea pigs are all social creatures and greatly benefit from being with others of their own kind. Two do not require much more space or attention than one, so consider adopting a companion for your new pet. Rats and guinea pigs can be spayed or neutered, allowing you to keep a male and female, but otherwise, only keep animals with others of the same sex—or else you'll quickly end up with dozens!

Whether you have one or more rodents, they all enjoy and need your affection and attention. Take time each day to hold, pet, and interact with your new friend. They may be a bit shy at first, but will quickly get to know and love being around you.

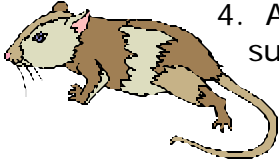
### **Kids and Rodents**

There is no reason why young children and mice, rats, or guinea pigs cannot be the best of friends, so long as your kids understand some simple facts about rodent behavior. Read this fact sheet aloud to your children, discuss it with them, and keep in mind these important reminders:

1. Rodents DO NOT like to be grabbed suddenly. Never pick an animal up by his tail.

2. DO NOT startle your pet while she is sleeping. You can gently pet behind the ears to let them know you are there.

3. Rats, mice, and guinea pigs enjoy gentle holding and petting on their heads, backs and behind the ears.



4. Always use two hands to pick up a mouse, guinea pig, or rat and support the body from underneath. Rats will often be happy to ride your shoulder or sit in a pocket. Hold rodents gently but firmly, close to your body.