



### HOUSING RATS IN GROUPS

**NEVER HOUSE A RAT ON THEIR OWN. EVEN WHEN THEY HAVE LOTS OF CONTACT WITH PEOPLE, RATS NEED TO BE KEPT WITH OTHER RATS. RATS KEPT WITH OTHER RATS ARE JUST AS FRIENDLY WITH PEOPLE.**

- Rats should be housed together from a young age, and ideally be siblings.
- Always try to introduce cage-mates to one another soon after weaning (three weeks of age) as this will result in less fighting.
- Keep rats in small same-sex groups (all males or all females).
- Whenever possible, avoid adding or removing individuals from a familiar group, as this will disrupt stable social groups and can lead to aggression.
- Separate young males and females as soon as possible after weaning so that they don't produce pups, which are difficult to find good homes for. Rats are perfectly content to be housed in single sex groups.
- Never house unneutered males and females together unless you wish to breed from them. You should only breed rats if you have already found good homes for all the pups.
- When unfamiliar adult rats are housed together there will be a period of high aggression, however if they establish a stable relationship the levels of aggression should drop. You can help reduce aggression if you:
  - Avoid disrupting stable social groups by permanently removing familiar rats, or adding unfamiliar rats, as this can be stressful;
  - Avoid anything that alters the smell of an individual as this may cause your rats to investigate their cage mate more and could lead to unnecessary aggression;
  - Provide enough resources so that all rats can access them at the same time (i.e. food bowls, water dishes, hiding places) and don't have to share if they don't want to;
  - Provide multiple shelters and visual barriers to help break-up aggressive encounters by helping rats move away from each other. Having multiple levels in their home cage can also help act as barriers to aggression.
  - Make sure that shelters have multiple exits to avoid particular rats stopping other cage mates from leaving the shelter.

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## RSPCA Rat Care Advice

### RSPCA COMPANION ANIMALS PET CARE FACTSHEET



- Aggressive grooming indicates social stress in groups of rats, as does strong vocalisation during an aggressive encounter.
- If you see increased aggression in a group of usually stable rats, this could indicate that there is a problem, check the health of your rats and that something has not changed in their environment. Monitor your rats carefully. If you are concerned seek advice from your vet.
- Rats in pain can show aggression towards their cage mates.
- If levels of aggression remain high between newly introduced rats, especially if it results in injury, this may indicate that those rats are unable to reach a stable dominance relationship and so should not be housed together.
- Consider separating your rats if one is hurt or frightened by the other and the problem lasts for more than a few days.



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