

MOUSE CARE GUIDE

While they may initially seem less interactive than other small animals, with proper care and love mice can be fun and social pets! Follow these tips to ensure that your new pets lead happy and healthy lives.

A. FEEDING

Mice are natural foragers. Although they can survive on a uniform staple food like lab blocks, they're much happier when they have a selection they can dig through and pick out what they want.

Mice should be given a packaged seed mix from a pet store daily. Make sure the mix is not too high in crude protein which can result in an unhealthy mouse and, in the worst case, allergies. Mice should not have more than 15% protein in their diet. Also bad is any food made by Kaytee. They use cheap ingredients and lots of preservatives. We recommend the following seed mixes available at pet stores and Chewy:

- Brown's Tropical Carnival Hamster and Gerbil Food
- Brown's Tropical Carnival Mouse and Rat
- Tiny Friends Farm Reggie Rat and Mimi Mouse
- Higgins Sunburst Rat & Mouse

You can also mix any of the above seed mixes together.

A single mouse will eat about two tablespoons of food per day. Let the bowl get almost empty before you put more food in. This will result in a more balanced diet, as the mice won't be able to just pick out their favorite foods from the mix. Be careful not to mistake empty seed shells in the bowl (such as millet) for food.

Give them a mousey 'salad' of fresh food, about 1/4 tablespoon (3/4 teaspoon) per mouse, twice a week. A good base 'salad' is:

- cooked brown rice
- toasted wheat bread
- rolled oats (regular, not quick oats) or uncooked oatmeal; just a pinch for either
- veggies like spinach, carrots, broccoli, or cauliflower
- herbs (basil, parsley, etc.)
- cucumbers
- pasta (cooked or uncooked)
- romaine lettuce
- fruits like apple, carrots, bananas, cucumbers, or pears
- scrambled egg OR bits of plain-cooked chicken or turkey (no red meat) OR insects like mealworms or crickets (no more than three per week, per mouse and can be freeze-dried)

Fresh food needs to be slowly introduced with only one new item per week until you have all the ingredients you wish for your salad built up in order to avoid upset stomachs. For example, Week 1: give spinach. Week 2: Give spinach and rice. Week 3, Give spinach, rice and scrambled egg etc, until you build up a complete 'salad' of what they like.

Any fresh food must be removed after two hours or it can go bad. You can make a big batch of salad and freeze it to keep it fresh.

Other foods mice like include: plain Cheerios (max 7 per mouse per day), corn flakes, molasses (blackstrap), flax seeds, barley, split peas (uncooked), cooked soya beans, yellow millet (sold for birds), Timothy hay (bake or freeze it first to remove parasites), grapes/blueberries/cranberries (should be peeled first). High sugar fruits such as grapes, blueberries, cranberries, melon, should be given sparingly as the high sugar content can give them digestive issues and cause dehydration.

Foods to Avoid:

- onion or garlic
- spices
- celery (the string is a choking hazard)
- avocado seeds
- cheese and dairy products (except Yogis or yogurt treats, which are safe in moderation)
- acidic fruit (oranges, lemons)
- raw meat (although live mealworms are ok)
- iceberg lettuce
- white millet (too fatty)
- fresh bread (stale bread has fewer enzymes)
- soda (mice do not have the ability to burp, so even a small amount of fizz can be harmful).

B. HABITAT

1. Tanks vs. Cages

Mice are incredibly adept at escaping from cages. Even bars that seem close enough together to contain them can often have a random spacing which is slightly bigger, enough for them to get out. A rule of thumb is that if a pen can fit through an opening, then so can a mouse. For this reason, the safest habitat is an aquarium tank. A 10-gallon tank is suitable for one mouse. A 20-gallon tank is fine for up to three mice. Make sure you get a metal screen top and put something heavy on it to weigh it down. Locking clips are sold separately, and can be effective unless you have a very determined and strong mouse. Keeping a secure lid is also important to keep house mice and other unwanted visitors from getting into your mouse's home.

Bin cages are an inexpensive and versatile option, as well. Instructions on how to construct bin cages are available on Youtube. Just make sure you use ¼" gauge wire and provide enough ventilation on the top and on at least one side.

2. Toys

Mice love a cluttered cage with lots of things to climb on, hide in, etc. If you have more than 3 mice, make sure you get two of everything: food dishes, water bottles, hideouts. One way to suspend things in a tank is to use a plastic grid also known as light diffuser (you'll find it in the lighting section at Home Depot). It cuts very easily with snips or wire cutters, and can be sized to fit right in the lip of the tank. The screen cover will easily fit over it, and it gives you a way to hang 'furniture.' CommandStrips are also an easy way to hang things from the sides of a tank.

Mice also need to chew constantly, so make sure your mouse has wooden chew blocks or apple twigs available. Other inexpensive toys that mice love include egg cartons, boxes (remove all tape), popsicle stick houses (non-toxic hot glue and Elmer's glue is mouse-safe!), willow twig and grass balls, natural/brown crinkle paper and toilet paper tubes.

3. Bedding

Always freeze or bake your bedding first to remove any parasites that may be lurking. Freezing must be done in a subzero freezer for 24 hours, while baking should be at 200 degrees for at least 2 hours. Options for mouse-safe bedding include: Kiln-dried pine or aspen shavings, Kaytee Clean and Cozy (unscented white), Carefresh unscented paper bedding, shredded white paper with no ink, Timothy hay, Hemp, or toilet paper (white unscented).

4. Wheels

Mice need wheels with a 6.5" or 7" diameter so that they don't have to arch too much when they run. Many wheels on the market today are not safe for mice. If the wheel has an axle or windmill blades, your mouse could get its tail caught, or if one mouse climbs in while another is spinning, its head could get caught. Also avoid wheels that have metal bars for the running surface.

The safest wheels are ones that have an open drum design (like a hat box without the lid) and are attached at the back, with no way for a mouse to get caught between moving parts. Pet stores and Chewy sell an open drum wheel made of mesh which is totally tail-safe. Some reviewers complain that it is noisy, but others say removing the washer or applying vegetable oil solves the problem. Periodically examine the running surface carefully because if the metal breaks apart, it could damage little mousy feet. The Comfort Wheel and Silent Spinner sold in pet stores are also safe open drum wheels. However, their solid plastic design means they can get dirty fast (mice will often pee and poop while they run) and should be cleaned daily if they get dirty. Also good for mice are the flying saucer wheels (medium, 6.5 inches, not the small 5.0 inch).

C. HANDLING

When picking up mice, try to gently scoop them instead of grabbing. Once you have a mouse in one hand, cup your other hand over it as soon as possible to prevent it from jumping. If you need to transfer your mouse to another holding area while you clean its home (Kritter Keepers are great for this), you can often wait for him to go into a tube and then pick up the entire tube. If you're gentle and don't spook him, you should be able to put the end of the tube into your holding area and your mouse will go right in.

If you need to catch a loose mouse, remember that mice love to hide in things. Often you can catch an escaped mouse by putting an empty cereal box in front of it. It'll usually dart in to hide. Quickly pick the box up, close the end, and get your mouse back to its home. If you can't be there to monitor when your mouse enters the box, instead purchase a Havahart humane mouse trap (available online or at Home Depot). Bait it with a little peanut butter and set it up overnight. Try to get your mouse back to its home as soon as possible once the trap has been tripped because mice need to drink often.

You may think that you'd like to introduce your mouse to other pets in the house as friends. However, rats and mice are natural enemies and shouldn't be allowed to play together. With other animals, keep in mind that mice move quickly and are often seen more as prey than other slower-moving animals. Even cats who are fine with pet rats may often go after pet mice. Mice can scare easily, so try not to stress them out by a forced meeting with another pet.

D. HEALTH

A common problem with mice is a skin condition usually caused by too much protein in their diet. Make sure their food has no more than 15% protein and do not give high protein treats

or snacks until the problem is resolved. If the problem persists, a vet visit is in order to determine if your mouse may have mites or another parasite, which can be contagious but can be easily treated. Sometimes, skin conditions are caused by overgrooming either by the mouse itself or by one of its cagemates. Make sure they have plenty of toys and distractions in their cage to reduce boredom which may lead to overgrooming or bullying.

Mice are also prone to upper respiratory infections. The symptoms may include labored breathing, nasal discharge (i.e., runny nose), arched back indicating distress and clicking or wheezing sounds when they are breathing. If caught early, URIs are easily treatable with antibiotics. If not treated, they could be fatal or at least cause permanent lung damage.

Inner ear infections are rare but do occur sometimes. You may notice your mouse's head tilting to one side or that they are having trouble sitting up or walking in a straight line. You should bring them to a vet ASAP, as inner ear infections are very treatable if caught early.

Finally, some mice may have neurological issues that can cause what's called "waltzing," where they are only able to walk in circles. They can still live a healthy happy life, as they are not in pain. But their cage should be set up to allow a clear path to food and water and to reduce ledges or tall platforms from which they could fall. If you notice your mouse walking in circles, you should take him or her to a vet to make sure it is not an inner ear infection, as the symptoms can be similar.