



RAT DIET AND NUTRITION

It is very important to feed your rats a healthy diet. When it comes to rat diets, the sad fact is a majority of foods sold in pet stores as “suitable for rats” contain ingredients that are either indigestible to them or are harmful to their health. Rats will chow down on selected ingredients in these food mixes happily, but that’s because they’re the rat equivalent of junk food. The stores and manufacturers mean well, but their products are based on decades of rat-keeping from a period before we knew better. Therefore, most rat chow or seed mixes sold as rat food in pet stores should be avoided, as they are very unhealthy for rats.

With rats you must be very careful about the protein and fat content. An ideal diet for rats contains between 14-16% protein and 8% fat or less. Young rats under 7 months old require more protein. Older rats require less protein. A diet lower in protein is important as their kidneys age and can’t process it as well. As they get older and their metabolism and activity slow down the extra protein can be rough on their kidneys. Also, just like with humans, too much protein can end up stored as fat in the liver. No one likes a fatty liver! High protein diets can also make an older rat’s skin very itchy. And finally, higher protein diets also tend to be higher in fat. Depending on the source of the protein this can significantly raise the level of saturated fats. Lower fat is always recommended because, as any of us get older, we tend to put on weight.

Our ultimate goal is to help you choose the healthiest and most economical rat food possible. With some attention to making proper choices, preparing your rats’ meals can be an easy process that’s fun for both you and your rats! MRR recommends feeding rats a high quality lab block supplemented by fruits and vegetables. Be sure to check out our [shop](#) page for the option to donate back to MRR with your rat food or treat purchase.

A. Lab Blocks

Rats should be free-fed these blocks in the cage at all times. We recommend:

1. Oxbow Adult Rat

Oxbow Adult Rat is a corn-free block that is available in pet and feed stores. Oxbow Mouse & Young rat is also available but is not as nutritionally complete, as it contains high amounts of corn and fillers. If you choose to feed Oxbow, we ask that you feed the adult variety. For younger rats, you should plan to supplement the additional needed protein in the form of fresh foods.

This is also the best option should you choose to purchase in bulk, as 20lb bags may be purchased for a competitive price per pound.

2. Oxbow Garden Select Rat

Oxbow also offers a “garden select” variety of their food. While we prefer the “essentials” variety of the diet, both Adult and Mouse & Young Rat Garden Select are nutritionally complete.

3. Science Selective

Science Selective offers a Rat & Mouse blend that is on the lower end of the protein range. If adopting younger animals, you should plan to supplement the additional needed protein in the form of fresh foods.

4. Envigo Teklad

Teklad blocks are available in 3 different formulas: 2014, 2016, and 2018 with 14, 16, and 18% protein respectively. If you are adopting rats under 7 months old, Teklad 2018 is the rat food option with the most appropriate amount of protein to suit a growing rat's needs.

HT can be purchased on Amazon but is not typically available via Chewy or pet stores.

5. Rascally Rat Nutri-Berries

If you find your rats to be craving some variety in their diet, Nutri-Berries are a healthy option to supplement one of the complete diets above.

B. Fruits and Vegetables

Fresh fruits and veggies are an important part of your rats' diet. If produce is out of season, or if it is difficult for you to keep it without spoiling, you can use frozen fruits and vegetables as well, which can be served frozen, thawed or cooked.

C. Treats

Rats can eat almost anything that is healthy for humans which makes feeding them fun. In fact, rats love to sample a part of your healthy dinner and will eat chicken, seafood, fish, pasta, rice, eggs, pizza, just about anything! Enjoy the fun of sharing your own favorite foods with your ratty companions--just make sure to try to keep it low on junk food.

D. Foods to Avoid

There are some foods that, while they may seem healthy, have qualities which make them hazardous. Check out this link to see foods that should be avoided when feeding your rats. <http://www.ratforum.com/showthread.php?39486-Good-and-Bad-Food-for-Rats-amp-Ratty-Recipes>

E. In the Pet Store

Dangerous viruses such as Sendai and SDA may be present in pet stores that carry live rodents. These viruses are airborne and can live off the rat for up to 3 hours. You do not need to touch a rat or even see a rat to carry these viruses home to your own pets. We recommend that you buy supplies online or at a store that does not carry rodents so it is much easier to keep quarantine at home. Otherwise, it is best to plan your errands such that the store is first on your list, followed by your other errands, and plan to be out of your home for 3 hours after leaving the store. For more information on rat illnesses, see our [Rat Education Overview](#) document.