

Rat Behavior Cheat Sheet

(A quick guide for those having to care for rats in the event of a community disaster or emergency)

Rat and Mouse Club of America rmca.org
Rat Guide ratguide.com
Eadie's House

- Rats only need just a **few seconds** to mate - even squeezing through wide cage bars to mate. Never house males and females together 'just for a moment.'
- **Never** pick up a rat by the tail - the tail may deglove (and it hurts!)
- **If you see red secretions** from a rat's nose or eyes, the substance is usually porphyrin, not blood. The secretion is produced by a special gland behind the rat's eyes. Overproduction of these secretions can be caused by **stress or illness**. In short, rat tears and snot.
- Rats regulate temperature through their tails and ears and can develop heatstroke at temperatures over 80 degrees F. A rat that is too warm will wet their fur by licking, letting moisture evaporate to cool. A **very hot** rat will lie on its back to release excess heat through the soles of his/her feet. Signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke include drooling and lethargy leading to unconsciousness.
- A very stressed or very happy rat may **chatter or grind its teeth together**. This is properly called 'bruxing,' and may also cause the eyes to slightly bulge or vibrate for a moment. Do not panic - bruxing is perfectly normal (although it looks pretty strange).
- **A female rat in heat** (approx. every five days) may act skittish, not wish to be touched on her rump, and may 'vibrate' her ears very quickly. Once again, this behavior may look strange (but cute!), and is perfectly normal.
- Rats have poor visual acuity; rats with ruby or pink eyes are nearly blind. Keep out of direct sunlight/bright lighting to protect their sensitive eyes. Rats may 'weave' their heads from side to side in order to better focus their vision, and 'see' with their whiskers, nose, and ears.
- Rats are predators where smaller animals are concerned, and will eat mice, gerbils, hamsters, and small birds if given the opportunity. A good rule of thumb would be to never place a rat in a situation that you would not trust a ferret.