# Toys and Other Environmental Enrichment for Rats and Mice

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Rats and mice are active, intelligent animals that require exercise and mental stimulation for optimal health. There are many fun and easy ways you can provide toys and enrich the environment of your pet rat or mouse.

#### Tunnels

Rats and mice, by their nature, use and make tunnels. You can provide ready-made tunnels, or let them make their own. Tunnels made of hardened plastic or PVC can be placed in the cage or hung by stainless steel wire hangers. Many of them come with elbows or Y's so you can make your own maze. PVC is easily cleaned. Be sure to select pipe with a large enough diameter to prevent the rodent from becoming stuck in the pipe. Blocks of wood can also be drilled to make tunnels, which the mice or rats may enlarge themselves by their natural tendency to gnaw.

#### Exercise wheels and balls

Activity wheels provide an excellent way for a rodent to exercise within the confines of his cage. Be sure to select a safe wheel, one that cannot trap the rodent's feet or tail. Solid wheels are definitely preferred over those with wire bars. Rats generally require a wheel 11 inches in diameter. Some wheels can be hung from the top or the side of the cage.

Exercise balls also provide good exercise outside of the cage. Always monitor your pet while she plays in an exercise ball to be sure she does not overheat and that she is in a safe area where the ball cannot go down the stairs or be otherwise hazardous.

### Climbing toys

Ladders, ropes, branches, tubes, cement bird perches, stacked boxes (securely fastened), hammocks, and other items can provide numerous climbing activities for your pet mouse or rat. These can be attached to the top and sides of the cage to greatly increase the amount of play area in a cage. Bricks and concrete blocks can also be used, if the cage is sufficiently large.

#### Chewing toys

Pet rats and mice need toys they can chew. This is necessary for their dental health since their teeth keep growing and need to be constantly worn down. Good chew toys for rats and mice include rawhide chews, Nylabones, Gumabones, wood (be sure it is safe, with no preservatives), and cardboard chew toys. Paper tubes from toilet paper or paper toweling, cardboard boxes, and egg cartons make very inexpensive chew toys.

#### Shredding toys

You will find that mice and rats also enjoy shredding softer substances such as toilet paper, straw, sisal, and other similar items. These can provide great entertainment and also soft material with which to line their sleeping area.

# Push and carry toys

Many rats enjoy small toys they can carry or push. Some sturdy hollow plastic cat toys with bells inside make good toys for rats and mice. Do not give your rats or mice toys made of soft rubber since small pieces of the toy that may be chewed and swallowed could cause an intestinal obstruction. Always monitor the habits of your pet rodent to be sure the toys he has continue to be safe.

## Foraging toys

In the wild, rats and mice spend much of their waking hours in search of food. Too often we simply put out a bowl of food for our pet, and he soon can become lazy and overweight. Provide your pet rat or mouse with mental stimulation by hiding their food in specially designed toys. There are many foraging toys designed for birds that can be used for rodents as well, such as pieces of cholla or bamboo. Fill the holes with some of your pet's food and watch him work to retrieve it. You can even make your own out of cardboard tubes or PVC.

Use your imagination and you will be able to give your pet mouse or rat toys that will provide hours of enjoyment.

