

General Practice Service
Willows Information Sheets

Looking after your mouse





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General

There are hundreds of varieties of 'fancy' mice in a range of coat types, colours and markings. Well kept mice can live for 1½ to 2½ years. They are lively social creatures that like to live in groups with other mice. To avoid unwanted breeding, mice should be kept in small single sex groups. Litter mates get on the best and groups of females are better, as males will tend to fight.

When considering mice as pets, it is important to note that mice are nocturnal, therefore they are most active at night. Also, be prepared for the fact that their urine can smell strongly.

Housing

Mice need a spacious metal cage, or a glass or plastic tank. Cages should have a deep plastic base rather than a wire base which could damage feet. The bars of the cage should be close enough together (less than 1cm) to prevent escape. Tanks need a wire mesh lid with small holes for ventilation. Remember that mice have very strong incisor teeth and can chew their way through wood.

For two mice, cages or tanks should be at least 45cm long x 30cm wide x 25cm high. Allow a further 30cm for each additional mouse.

The cage or tank should be placed in a well ventilated warm room away from draughts and direct sunlight or heat. Keep your mice away from constant noise (e.g. the hum of a fridge freezer) or loud noise (e.g. TVs or music systems). It is not a good idea to keep mice in a child's bedroom as they are most active at night and are likely to keep your child awake.

Bedding

Respiratory disease is common in mice. Selecting the right type of bedding can help to reduce respiratory problems. Wood shavings, sawdust and sand should be avoided. Cedar and pine wood shavings contain phenol whilst sawdust and sand tend to be dusty. Phenol and dust are both irritants to the respiratory system.

Line cages or tanks with newspaper and use shredded paper or cardboard, commercially available recycled paper bedding or hemp bedding. Make sure that the bed is deep enough to allow your mice to burrow.

A separate nesting area should be provided in a cardboard or plastic box where the mice can burrow out of sight to sleep. The ideal bedding for nesting is shredded clean white paper (e.g. kitchen paper) and soft hay. Avoid fluffy bedding such as cotton wool as it can wrap around limbs or cause impactions in the stomach if eaten.

Soiled areas of bedding should be cleaned out daily and the whole cage or tank should be cleaned out completely each week.

Feeding

Fresh water must be provided daily from a drip feed bottle with a metal spout.

Feed a good quality rat or mouse mix based on mixed seeds and grains. Do not feed hamster food and avoid mixes containing lots of sunflower seeds and coloured corn flakes. Contrary to popular belief, mice do not need dairy products. Provide small pieces of fresh fruit (not citrus fruit) and vegetables. Feed small amounts of fresh food frequently and remove any uneaten food daily.

Gnawing is important to wear down incisor teeth. Dog biscuits (based on egg and oatmeal without meat derivatives), gnawing blocks or untreated apple wood are good for this.

Foraging behaviour can be encouraged by hiding food in cardboard tubes and under pots.

Exercise

Use your imagination to make the cage or tank more interesting for your mice. They like to climb so it is a good idea to provide different levels with shelves or baskets. Natural ropes can also be used for climbing in addition to gnawing. Cardboard tubes and egg boxes can be used for hiding, climbing and gnawing. Plastic yoghurt pots or flower pots are also good for climbing on or hiding in.

Activity wheels should be solid and wide. Wheels with spokes can trap limbs and cause injury. The wheel should be big enough that your mouse's back doesn't bend.

Handling

Mice are easily tamed with quiet, gentle handling but they are very delicate and can easily be hurt, therefore children should only handle them under close adult supervision.

Mice can be picked up by gently cupping them in two hands. Approach them from the front, not from above, and do not approach them in their sleeping compartment. Always hold them over a low flat surface and do not drop them. Be careful because they can move at surprising speeds. Mice can be steadied by gently holding on to the base of their tails but they should **never** be picked up by their tails.

If your mouse bites you and is holding on to your finger, be brave and gently lower the mouse on to a flat surface where it will let go. Do not try to pull it off (it will bite harder) and do not flick it off (it will be seriously hurt).

Health

Check your mice daily. They should be alert, bright eyed and active. There should be no discharge around their eyes, ears, mouth and nose or under their tails. They should have quiet, regular breathing with no sneezing. Their coats should be glossy with no bald patches. There should be no lumps or bumps and their nails and teeth shouldn't be overgrown.

Health problems that mice suffer from include:

- Respiratory infections
- Mites, lice and ringworm
- Damaged limbs, tails and backs from falling or getting caught in housing
- Overgrown nails and incisor teeth
- Tumours

If you have any concerns about your mice, then please don't hesitate to [contact us](#).

General Practice Service
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