

DIET AND NUTRITION

Diet

Rats are opportunistic granivore omnivores, which means that they will eat what is available, be it plant or animal matter, but require the majority of their diet to be grains and seeds. Many rodents have different dietary requirements, which is why it is not recommended to offer your rat a diet geared towards another rodent such as hamsters. Certain human foods such as cereals and processed foods can be very high in fats, sugars and salt, which are extremely unhealthy. Sugars and salt have been proven to promote and aid in tumour growth.

There are many different ways to feed your rats to ensure they get all the nutrients they require. All values below are approximate and may change based on various factors including but not limited to environmental temperature, age of rat, sex of rat, pregnancy/lactation status, type of foods offered, etc.

A rat can eat between 15-40g per day, depending on the above factors.

Protein: 15%-18%

Fat: 2.5%-6%

Fibre: 5-10%

Ash/Minerals: 7-8.5%

Some feeding methods will be outlined below. Talk to your breeder to determine what the best option for you is, as well as suggested recipes.

GRAINS, SEED AND FRESH DIET

This diet is based on the rats getting 50% of their food from a grain and seed mix, and the other 50% from fresh foods. They are offered fresh breakfast, a scattering of grain mix, and fresh dinner. This diet is great for offering your rats a great variety, but can be costly if you do not have feed stores local to you to obtain the grains and seeds, and/or if you live in an area where fresh foods are expensive and you are unable to grow your own. This method is also very time consuming and is not always realistic. This method of feeding has a high chance of selective eating if not carefully monitored and lean periods not strictly adhered to. We recommend using the URC Basic Mix instead of mixing your own grains and seeds.

THE DRY MIX DIET

This is the most commonly used form of feeding. This diet assumes you are feeding a mix that together provides all the nutrients a rat needs, while occasionally (1-4 times a week) offering fresh food as well. The biggest risk with this method of feeding is that if you have picky eaters, they may end up lacking in certain vitamins and minerals. There are many dry mixes on the market, ensure that you are buying one that is suitable for your rat, or using a recipe that is healthy and proven. We recommend the URC Maintenance Mix, Reggie Rat or Versele Laga Rat Nature.

PELLETED DIET

Unfortunately, in South Africa we do not yet have a rat block that is complete and healthy. Thus far, the closest we have come is Selective Rat Pellets and Monty and Me Essentials, which is a dog pellet but is in line with a rats' dietary requirements. On a true complete pellet, offering fresh foods is not a requirement and most only do so on an ad-hoc basis. Many pellets are not complete and require monitoring. We have used Monty and Me Essentials for many years with no issues and no supplementation needed, and therefore recommend this pellet.

COMBINATION DIET

This diet is for those who do not have the time or ability to offer a lot of fresh foods but would still like to offer something. This diet utilises a decent pellet as the staple, with a grain and seed mix offered once a week alongside a fresh meal. On days where fresh foods and seeds are offered, the pellet is not offered.

A typical week on this diet may look like the following :

Monday-Saturday : Pellets

Sunday Morning- Porridge

Sunday Afternoon- Grain and Seed Mix

Sunday Evening- Fresh/Cooked Meal

DO NOT FEED:

- ❖ Wild insects
- ❖ Stones/Pits/Seeds
- ❖ Avocado Skin
- ❖ Liquorice
- ❖ Sweets/Mints
- ❖ Unripe fruits/veg
- ❖ Carbonated drinks
- ❖ Excess sugar
- ❖ Blue/Moldy Cheese

TAKE NOTE WHEN FEEDING:

- ❖ Citrus- In a study where rats were fed extremely high amounts of d-limonene concentrate for an extended period of time, it was found that it increased the likelihood of cancer in male rats. This does not mean it is unsafe for male rats to consume, it simply means that it must be fed in moderation, as with most things
- ❖ High water content vegetables such as cucumber or iceberg lettuce- These foods are not unsafe to feed, however provide very little nutrition and are mostly water. This can come in handy for long trips, however please note that overfeeding of these items may cause runny stools

- ❖ Almonds- Bitter almonds are high in emulsion which produces cyanide under certain circumstances. Sweet almonds do not have this same enzyme and therefore do not produce cyanide. Most commercially available almonds are sweet almonds.
- ❖ Spinach- This vegetable is high in oxalate and should therefore be fed in moderation
- ❖ Rhubarb- Only to be fed when cooked and be very limited
- ❖ Onion family (onions, leeks, spring onions)- More palatable when cooked however can be fed raw, to be fed in moderation
- ❖ Aubergine/Eggplant- Can be fed raw or cooked but is more palatable when cooked. Should be fed in moderation as it has a small nicotine concentration
- ❖ Beans- Can be fed when cooked. Raw beans contain antinutrients
- ❖ Foods high in sugar- These should be limited
- ❖ Endive- Increases calcium absorption and bone density so useful for young rats but should be fed in moderation as too much can cause issues
- ❖ Loganberry- Bitter when raw, should be fed cooked
- ❖ Sweet Chestnuts- May cause stomach upset if fed raw
- ❖ Leaves and Flowers of Tomato- Avoid feeding
- ❖ Sticky foods such as peanut butter- This may pose a choking hazard for some rats and should be monitored when fed or watered down
- ❖ Lactose- Some rats may be lactose intolerant. Introduce dairy slowly and in small amounts, monitoring stools for any abnormalities
- ❖ High fat foods- Rats cannot metabolise fats in the same way that we do and therefore all unhealthy fats should be avoided

TO ORDER ANY OF THE URC DRY MIXES OR PELLETS, PLEASE CONTACT CALICO RATTERY & EXOTICS
DIRECTLY VIA FACEBOOK OR EMAIL