

# MICE

Domesticated mice are small, timid rodents that are entertaining to watch. They are relatively easy to care for, and if handled frequently, make wonderful pets. If this is your first mouse, it is important to understand that they are *not* just small dogs or cats. They have unique requirements for their care that many new owners are not aware of. Your mouse veterinarian will discuss how to properly care for your new pet and keep him or her healthy and happy!

## WHAT DO I FEED MY MOUSE?

Proper nutrition is one of the most important aspects of your mouse's health. Many of the disease conditions we see in mice are due to improper diet. In the wild, mice primarily feed on a mixture of leaves, seeds, roots, fruits, and insects. Pet mice should be fed a formulated *rodent pellet* that contains moderate to high levels of protein. There are numerous seed mixes that are marketed for mice, but these are not recommended. They contain high levels of fat and can lead to obesity, nutritional deficiencies, and medical problems.

*Treats* may be given in limited quantities. Cereal, breads, seeds, cheese, fresh fruits, and vegetables may be given in small amounts. Try to avoid the gas-forming vegetables such as broccoli and cauliflower.

Mice are very prone to *obesity* so it is important to limit seeds and treats. *Grass hays* such as timothy, brome, orchard, or oat are great snacks that will not cause obesity. In addition, hay is fun to burrow and hide in.

Finally *fresh water* provided daily is essential. If using water bottles, make sure the sipper tubes do not become clogged. Remember to wash your dishes and water bottles at least weekly.

## WHERE SHOULD I KEEP MY MOUSE?

You should *always* keep your mouse in a cage when he or she is not supervised. Cages should be sufficiently large, measuring at least 15 square inches per mouse. Wire cages provide more ventilation than solid structures. Mice are great escape artists, so it is important that the plastic or wire of the cage can not be chewed through. The cage floor should be solid and covered in deep bedding and nesting material. Appropriate bedding includes shredded newspaper, recycled newspaper products, shredded tissue, or aspen shavings. Avoid cedar or pine shavings. Place your mouse's cage in a quiet area of the house. Avoid direct sunlight and cold drafts. The cage should be cleaned at least weekly.

Mice are natural burrowers and like to explore their environment. Use your imagination to design your mouse's toys and cage furniture. Tunnels for play and an exercise wheel are very important. Solid exercise wheels are preferred over wire ones. Provide your mouse with an area for hiding or sleeping. Hay and old mittens or socks are fun things to burrow in!

Mice are very social and more than one mouse may be housed together. Occasionally, mice can become aggressive to each other and may need to be housed singly. Dominant mice may 'barber' or chew the fur on less dominant mice.

As with all animals, prevent access to electrical cords, frayed fabric or loose carpet that could be ingested, lead paint, houseplants, pesticides or cleaning products, tobacco and cigarette smoke, and dogs, cats, or other predators.

## VETERINARY CARE

Mice do not require any vaccinations, but should have a physical examination performed annually by a veterinarian who is knowledgeable about mice. In older pets, blood work, urinalysis, and x-rays may be recommended, though anesthesia is often needed to perform these tests due to their small size.

Respiratory diseases, parasites and other skin diseases, and cancer are the most common reasons to visit the veterinarian.

Mice hide signs of illness until they are very sick. It is important to contact your veterinarian *early* if you notice any of these signs:

Poor appetite	Abnormal stools	Overgrown teeth
Drooling	Tooth grinding	Difficulty eating
Lumps	Dandruff or flaky skin	Itchiness or hair loss
Change in urination	Bleeding	Difficulty breathing
Sneezing or coughing	Discharge from nose/eyes	Listlessness
Weakness	Difficulty walking	Increased water consumption

## DID YOU KNOW?

- Average life span: 1-3 years
- Mice are mainly *nocturnal*, but can be active during the day.
- Female mice are preferred over males as pets. Males produce urine with a strong, musky odor.
- Mice cut each other's hair! This is called *barbering*. Dominant mice barber the other mice in the cage. It is wise to seek veterinary care if you notice this, though, as parasites can cause similar signs.
- It is best for children to handle mice while sitting down. They can be very quick to escape and injure themselves if dropped.