

# Care of the Pet Mouse

Mice are good-natured, inquisitive creatures that make great, inexpensive, low-maintenance pets. The most common pet mouse is the standard white laboratory mouse (*Mus musculus*) however different varieties are now entering the pet trade. Pet mice also come in many different colors and hair coats including satin, spotted and even longhaired. Pet mice are typically 3-4 in (7.6-10 cm) in length with a weight of approximately 30 g (1 oz). The average life span of most pet mice is 1-2 years. Mice are mainly nocturnal becoming more active in the evenings and during the night.

## **Diet**

Offer a rodent ration containing 12-16% protein and 4-6% fat, either in pellet or block form. Avoid commercially available seed-based diets as they predispose your mouse to obesity and nutritional deficiencies. Supplement the diet with small amounts of fresh fruit (i.e. apples, bananas, and grapes), raw vegetables, and freshly washed, salad greens. Dandelion leaves are often a favorite treat of mice. Other occasional treats may include low sugar cereals (i.e. Cheerios<sup>®</sup>, General Mills; puffed wheat, rice, or millet cereals, or spoon-size shredded wheat), plain popcorn, dry oatmeal, cooked pasta, or whole-wheat bread. Avoid cheese as it is high in fat and rodents cannot tolerate large amounts of lactose.

Provide water in a water bottle. Position the sipper tube low enough to allow the pet easy access. Although mice drink only a fraction of the total bottle volume, the bottle should be emptied, cleaned and refilled with fresh water daily.

## **Housing**

Provide the largest cage possible for your pet mouse. Rodents are notorious chewers so cages of stainless steel, durable plastic, or wire are recommended. Avoid caging constructed from wood or soft metal. A cage should have a solid plastic base with closely spaced metal bars for both containment and ventilation purposes. Avoid chain-link or mesh types of flooring as mice can easily injure their feet. An aquarium with a screen top can serve for housing, but tanks must be taken to clean more often as ventilation is reduced.

Provide enrichment in the form of tunnels, exercise wheels, and nest boxes to maintain the mental well being of your pet. Old paper towel or toilet paper tubes and wood gnaws can be used as toys and give your pet something constructive to chew on.

Provide ample nesting material and deep bedding for burrowing, resting, and to soak up urine. Select clean, absorbent, non-toxic, and odor free bedding. Recycled paper products

(i.e. CareFRESH<sup>®</sup>, Absorption Corp) or aspen shavings make the best lining materials. There are a number of beddings that should be avoided:

- Cedar shavings contain chemicals that are toxic and can cause irritation.
- Corncob bedding has a tendency to mold and can lead to intestinal obstruction if ingested.
- Sawdust or any pine shavings can cause irritation to the eyes and the respiratory tract.

Also provide shredded paper towels or tissue as nesting material. Avoid the commercially available fluffy cotton wool products as these materials are indigestible and can lead to intestinal obstruction if eaten.

Provide tunnels, exercise wheels, and nest boxes to help maintain the mental well-being of your pet. Offer cardboard tube rolls and wood blocks as chew toys.

Optimal temperature range for rodents falls between 65-78°F (18-26°C), with a relative humidity of 40-70%. Keep the cage out of direct sunlight and away from other heat sources, such as a radiator, or drafts.

Clean the cage and all cage furniture thoroughly once or twice weekly. Changing the bedding and disinfect all areas of the habitat. Clean food dishes and the water bottle. Plastic and glass housing structures reduce ventilation, and can lead to problems with temperature and odor control, so more frequent cleaning may be necessary.

Females or mixed sex pairs do well together, however if keeping mixed sex pairs it is recommended to have the male neutered as they are prolific breeders. Males usually get along fine with other males if they are littermates or introduced at a young age, otherwise it is recommended to house males separately.

## **Handling and restraint**

Mice are curious, confident animals that seldom bite when handled properly. Mice not accustomed to being handled may jump and run, but they become aggressive, although mice housed alone are more likely to be aggressive than those housed in a group. Mice may be tamed over a short span of time with gentle, regular handling. Most mice will approach a hand introduced into their cage and can be easily scooped into the palm. Pet mice may also be gently lifted up by the tail and placed in a cupped hand. Do not feed your mouse through the top of the cage as this teaches them that objects entering this way, such as your hand, are food, which increases the risk of biting.