

# Mouse Care Guide

**Mice are great pets that are social, active and alert. They are inquisitive and love exploring and can even be taught tricks.**

## Feeding

Mice should have constant access to a Superior Nutrition mouse specific diet that will make up around 70% of their daily diet. Varieties such as Supreme Science Selective or Vetafarm are high quality, researched diets that have the essential nutrients needed to ensure your mice stay healthy.

Mice also benefit from having supplemental foods such as vegetables, protein and some cooked foods as part of their daily diet. Providing a variety of choices helps with enrichment, encouraging natural behaviour and these can also be used as treats. Mouse specific treats are also available to help with training, rewards and bonding.

Most popular supplemental foods for mice include cooked egg, cooked chicken and bones (great for their teeth) cooked pasta, peas, carrot, cooked corn, cooked kumara, blueberries, banana, grapes and avocado. Be mindful of excess protein or any added salt during the cooking process. Introduce all new foods gradually.

Do not feed citrus fruits, rhubarb, raw peanuts, raw potatoes or kumara, carbonated drinks, alcohol or caffeine. Be careful with sticky foods such as peanut butter as it can cause choking.

Food not eaten within 24 hours should be discarded.

## Water

Water should be available at all times. Drink bottles are recommended rather than bowls or in addition to them, as mice may toilet in bowls. We recommend having a minimum of two water bottles available in case one runs out or has a blockage, these should be placed at different levels within the cage.

## Housing Considerations

Female mice should be kept in pairs or groups and often thrive in large social groups of female mice. They are highly social animals and it is not abnormal for other female mice to share care of each other's young. Having pairs or groups of female mice does not negatively affect their bond with humans; in fact mice are likely to be more comfortable and outgoing with their surroundings when kept in a suitable group.

However male mice are fiercely independent. Due to their territorial nature they should not be kept with other male mice as severe fighting often occurs and can lead to injuries and fatalities. A male mouse can be desexed and kept with a group of females.

It's important that the enclosure is not in direct sunlight, draughts or places of extreme temperature change (mice should never be housed outdoors). Ideally, the cage should be made of metal (wired) and must be well ventilated but escape proof. It is best to provide the largest habitat you can afford as mice are very active. The Pet One three story mouse cage is considered a great starter cage for two-three females or one male. If you wish to have a bigger group or provide a larger space for your mice, you can look into larger bird cages to house them but be mindful of the gaps in between bars. Mice need cages where the gaps between the bars are no larger than around 1/4 inch (0.6cm) otherwise they can flatten themselves to escape through these spaces.

Larger cages allow for more room for platforms, ropes and hammocks to then become a mouse palace. Fish tanks are not suitable housing for mice due to the lack of ventilation.

Mice do best when kept in social areas of your home such as the lounge, but be careful placing them near the kitchen or near strong smelling scents as they have delicate respiratory systems. Mice can be active and noisy at night time so keep this in mind if you are considering keeping them in a bedroom.

## Enclosure Setup



The ideal mouse enclosure should include multiple hidey houses, hammocks or hanging hideaways as mice love to be off the ground.

Width is more appreciated than height, but with tall cages there should be clear 'stations' of feeding, hiding, and play areas to help encourage your mice to use all levels of their enclosure.

Wheels included in enclosures should have a diameter around 15cm for adult size mice to ensure adequate room for safe running and stride. Full plastic wheels are easiest to clean and safer as they prevent toes and tails getting caught. Critter balls

are not recommended as these fully sealed units can be stressful for a mouse and do not allow them to control the interaction, unlike wheels where they can easily stop running and move onto their next adventure.

Mice are very inquisitive and play for large portions of the day. Mouse wheels, ladders and rope toys make excellent gymnasiums. Encourage explorative and play behaviours by hiding treats around the cage and providing a variety of rotated toys for them to play on and hide in.

The bedding or substrate in the bottom of the cage needs to be chemical and dust free. Suitable bedding types for mice include aspen, pelleted paper based products, krittter crumble and some wood pellets. Always check if the product is safe for mice as they have sensitive respiratory tracts and often many wood/pine beddings can aggravate this delicate system.

A 4cm deep layer is advised on the base of the cage and should be cleaned regularly. Hay or straw is not recommended as it can be quite sharp and provides no nutritional value to a mouse's diet.

Levels in the enclosure can often be covered with polar fleece to provide softer and varied surfaces, particularly under hiding areas to provide a comforting base for the mice.

Mice require weekly in depth cleaning with spot cleaning during the week. Sometimes they may require cleaning more regularly depending on enclosure size, number of mice housed in the enclosure etc. Mice are known for having quite a strong smell and regular cleaning of the enclosure and provision of absorbent bedding will help minimise these odours.

Toys, soft bedding and hides should be cleaned weekly or more regularly if required.

## Enrichment and Training

Mice are incredibly smart and love rewarded learning. Mice can even be taught tricks such as spin, retrieving items, coming when called, 'sit up' and love obstacle courses. All training requires patience, kind handling, plenty of treats and consistency.

Daily time out of their cage with you is essential and will also help with exercise, tameness and having happy mice. In the wild, mice are naturally inquisitive and active animals so simulating that level of exercise is important.

Mice can be toilet trained by having designated litter tray in the corner of their cage and placing stray droppings into it when they toilet elsewhere. A flat stone can also be added to the litter tray to encourage peeing in the tray. While this is not always 100% it can help with maintaining a cleaner enclosure.

Another way to enrich your mouse's life is to offer them opportunities to work for their favourite treats, such as vegetable fishing and dig boxes and to rotate through their toys, levels and enclosure textures and accessories to enrich their enclosure.

### **Vege Fishing:**

Place a heavy shallow ceramic bowl or dish and fill with water, add some of your mice favourite veges (such as peas, corn pieces). Some mice will love water and others may be more wary and may take several tries to get excited about playing in their vegetable pool. This is a great way to help them keep cool in summer, and a lot of fun to watch.

### **Dig Boxes:**

Dig boxes are a great way to encourage explorative and nesting behaviours. You can create dig boxes by placing a selection of soft material, fleece, tissues and/or other bedding into a box or hidey, with sprinkled treats at each layer. Mice will often get very excited to rip this new toy apart searching for all the best bits.

## **Handling and Behaviour**



Mice need at least an hour out of their cage every day with handling and interaction, and to stretch their legs.

Never pick up a mouse by its tail as this is painful for them and can cause harm.

You should always pick them up around their stomach and support their feet with your other hand. Carrying around your mouse on your shoulders and in your clothes also helps them feel safe and secure.

Keep in mind when you get a new pet that it will take time for them to settle into their new home, and

particularly with young mice they tend to be jumpier and more flighty than an older mouse.

To get your mouse used to handling, start with a soft food (such as yoghurt) on a spoon and reward good behaviour such as your mouse coming towards you when you put your hand in their cage. Always reward good behaviour with a treat and verbal praise. Mice are very food driven and often bond easily with those who feed them.

When your mice are spending time out of their cage make sure that the area is secure and free of other pets and safe. It's not easy to let your mice out to free range as they are more likely to get lost due to their small size and flighty nature. However if you do have a secure area and are confident in their safety you may want to let your mouse explore a little. Make sure the area, like a small room, is free of other pets and all doorways, under door gaps, and windows are closed.

All mice will have their own personalities, but there are some key traits across the genders. Males are bigger than females, tend to have a stronger smell, and can often mark on things. However

they are known for being super laid back and cuddly. Girls are active, playful and very inquisitive and usually don't like to sit still much. Their coats are super soft and don't smell as much as boys.

An affectionate mouse enjoying a cuddle with their owner may grind their teeth, make small squeaky noises or do shivery vibrates (like a cats purr). Once mice are used to handling they can be quite privy to a chin scratch and may try and groom your fingers in return.

You should always wash your hands before and after handling your mouse or its cage contents. Pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems should ask their doctor before considering mice as pets.

## Health

As with all pets, it's important to be prepared for medical expenses, throughout their lifetime, including unexpected care.

Mice can be prone to respiratory issues, tumours, abscesses, mites and lice. It's recommended that you get your mice desexed which will help reduce some of the tumour risks.

Finding a confident mouse-savvy vet is important, and ensure you keep a close eye on your mice for any changes in physiology or behaviour that could indicate illness. Keep in mind that mice have a very short lifespan (around two years), and from about 12 months of age they may start to show signs of aging, become slower and need a little extra attention to ensure they are comfortable.

### **The signs of a healthy mouse include:**

- Active, alert and sociable
- Healthy fur
- Clear bright eyes
- Eats and drinks regularly
- Walking and moving normally
- Normal stools

### **The signs of an unhealthy mouse include:**

- Diarrhoea
- Overgrown teeth
- Weight loss
- Lumps or bumps on the skin
- Abnormal hair loss
- Lethargy
- Eye or nasal discharge
- Sneezing, or coughing.
- Audible or laboured breathing

- Unusual stools
- Changes to behaviour, activity levels or personality

If you notice any of these signs please contact your veterinarian for advice.

### **Other Health Notes:**

Porphyrin is a reddened discharge that appears around the eyes, nose and down the back. This can be mistaken for blood in some cases. Porphyrin can be related to a mouse being sick or stressed however is usually not an issue in small amounts. Please contact your veterinarian should you ever be concerned.

Ensure there are plenty of wooden chews in your enclosure to prevent overgrown teeth.

'Buck grease' is an oily orange substance that is apparent in male mice only due to an overproduction of testosterone. Washing this off your mice will not get rid of it and can often stress your mice out more. The best way to reduce/get rid of buck grease is to neuter them which reduces these testosterone levels.

## **Grooming**

Mice are naturally clean animals and do a great deal of self-grooming, although some may need a little extra help as they get older. They don't require bathing unless your veterinarian has recommended it as bathing is generally unnecessary and can be quite stressful to a mouse.

Mice have sharp claws and although these can be trimmed by a confident trained person, they can often be kept worn down by including a variety of textures, including Lava/Pumice stone ledges placed at a key area like a food bowl, treat hanger or water bottle. Should you require trimming your mouse's nails we would recommend talking to your local veterinarian to show you the safest way possible and the best tools to use.

## **Recommended Supplies**

- Good sized cage suitable to house a minimum of two-three female mice or one male mouse
- High quality mouse specific food
- Two large water bottles
- Paper/Aspen or suitable bedding
- Wheel/exercise toys
- Ceramic food bowls
- Chew toys & treat sticks
- Hammocks, tunnels and hideys
- Nesting material

## **Are mice right for you and your family?**

- I have the appropriate housing for this pet.
- I understand that male and female mice should not be housed together.

- I understand that male mice should be kept on their own but females will thrive with same-sex companionship.
- I can provide daily supervised time for my mouse/mice.
- I can commit to taking appropriate care for my mouse/mice.
- I can commit to enriching the life of my mouse/mice and providing all appropriate care.
- An adult can provide primary care for this pet.

**Average size:** 7.5cm

**Life span:** Up to 2 years