



INTRODUCTIONS

Introducing new rats can be a stressful experience. No two introductions are the same: some rats will take immediately to new friends with little or no resistance, others may take days (sometimes weeks) of getting used to each other before they can cohabit, while other ratties can never comfortably cohabit. There are some strategies that can help the process go more smoothly!

Before we begin, it is important to learn The Golden Rule of Rat Introductions:

STAY COOL AS A CUCUMBER!

Rats can sense human anxiety so....if we are uptight, they figure something must be wrong and they become uptight. As hard as it may be, you must stay calm, remain watchful (!) but calm.

A. Take a Deep Breathe and Let's Start with some Helpful Hints

1. Proceed SLOWLY!

While some rats may get along immediately, do not assume this will be the case. It is better to take too much time with introductions than rushing and ending up with an injured rat.

2. Choose Compatible Friends

Maximize your chances of a successful introduction by combining rats that are most compatible. For example, intact males will accept spayed females more easily than other intact males, especially when adult. This also applies to their ages; introduce young, but not too young. It is always easier to introduce babies to babies than adults to adults. A territorial adult male could be inclined to eliminate his competition, however, so you should not introduce any babies under six weeks old to an adult male.

3. Bring your Personal Rats with You for the Pickup.

We often ask adopters to bring any current rats along with them when picking up their newbies. Dab with vanilla, give them some very yummy treats to share on the car ride, and you may well be on your way to introduction success.

4. Choose the Right Time of Day

Rats are biologically crepuscular. This means that the average rat is inclined toward being most active at night and in the early morning twilight hours and therefore is sleepest in the late morning through the middle of the day. Sleepy time is the best time to introduce rats, as they will all be a little out of it and less likely to cause a commotion. The earlier in the day the better. They will then have their 'siesta' together.

5. Introduce in Neutral Territory

The first few face-to-face introductions should happen in an area that no rat can claim as their own space. This can be a table top, a room no rat has had access to before, or the ever-favorite bath tub. Place a couple of upside down boxes that can be easily lifted for observation but nothing so small such that a rat gets 'cornered' into a spot and feels trapped within. This usually leads to the rat trying to protect its 'territory'. Throw some Cheerios around and have a "Cheerio Party".

6. Clean the Cage before Co-Habitation

Before you let new rats hang out in a cage together, it is best to clean it thoroughly to reduce the chance of rats becoming territorial over old smells. Better yet, if feasible, buy that new cage you've been thinking about buying and let them move into a brand new, smell-free home together. You should also rearrange the cage setup or move the cage to a new room to make it feel less familiar to all rats.

7. No Blood, no Foul

Rule of thumb: do not separate unless there is blood drawn or signals that a serious fight may ensue. It is very normal for rats to scuffle and puff up and pin each other down as they establish a new hierarchy within the cage. Often people separate too soon and the process has to start all over again. Babies especially may tend to squeak in distress for no reason whenever they are approached by a larger adult.

B. Quick Method

Some rats become friends fairly easily and quickly. Follow these steps to help things go more smoothly. Take care to avoid some of the more stressful introduction tips if your rats are senior or delicate in health.

1. Bring your personal rat(s) with you for the pickup so that the new crew ride home together in the car. A long ride home helps with bonding.
2. Put vanilla extract on their bottoms and heads so that they all smell the same. You can also try covering them all with vanilla pudding and watch them clean each other off!
3. Once home, give them some time to explore in a neutral space. They'll all be a bit confused from the ride which helps establish their new friendships.
4. After some time in the neutral space, put them directly into the clean cage and step away. DO NOT HOVER OVER THEM.
5. And now you wait....it is a good idea to leave newly introduced rats in their cage together for at least a day/overnight, to seal the bond, before starting to take them out again for one-on-one or group playtimes. They need to cement their new friendship.

6. If the ratties do not settle down, you can try the bath tub method.....put them all in the bath tub with running water and let the tub fill with water. Place something to use as an island so that they all flock to the island and stay together. Note: for some rats, this method may be too stressful.
7. You can also put them back into the carrier and take an extended drive. Drive them to a friend's home to spend a few hours visiting!
8. Another slightly stressful method includes putting the ratties into a carrier together and turning the vacuum on near the carrier.

The short version of all of this is that rats will bond under stress! However, take care to avoid some of the more stressful introduction tips if your rats are senior or delicate in health. If all attempts at a 'quick introduction' fail, a re-set is in order and onto the 'courtship method'.

C. Slower "Courtship" Method

A longer introduction is often the best way to introduce new rats, especially those having trouble accepting a new friend. Here is the most tried and true scenario to help your new rats get along:

1. Spend the first few days with the cages next to each other, within sniffing distance but far enough apart such that they cannot reach each other. Every 12-24 hours, swap the rats between cages.
2. Spend at least 3 days taking the rats into the bathtub (or other neutral territory, see the hints above) for supervised visits of 1 hour or more. You can try putting some vanilla extract on their bottoms and heads so they smell the same and are less likely to fight.
3. You can also spend some time carrying the rats around in a bonding pouch or a hooded sweatshirt worn in reverse such that the hood is in the front of your body. 20 minutes is the magic number!
4. When this seems to be going well, let them run around a rat room or neutral space with plenty of room to get away from each other if need be.
5. Once they are continuously getting along at this stage, thoroughly clean the cage and attempt to house everyone together.

D. Helpful Links

<http://www.ratfanclub.org/newrat.html>

More on introductions, especially with at least one adult rat.

http://ratguide.com/care/behavior/introducing_rats.php

Further tips on those difficult introductions (aggressive or scared rats, a breeding pair, etc).

GOOD LUCK!!