



RAT DIET AND NUTRITION

It is very important to feed your rats a healthy diet. When it comes to rat diets, the sad fact is that nearly every food sold in pet stores as suitable for rats contains ingredients that are either indigestible to them or are harmful to their health. Rats will chow down on selected ingredients in these food mixes happily, but that's because they're the rat equivalent of junk food. The stores and manufacturers mean well, but their products are based on decades of rat-keeping from a period before we knew better. Therefore, most rat chow or seed mixes sold as rat food in pet stores should be avoided, as they are very unhealthy for rats.

With rats you must be very careful about the protein and fat content. An ideal diet for rats contains between 14-16% protein, and 8% fat or less. Young rats under 7 months old require more protein which is why we ask that they be fed the **Envigo/Teklad 2018**.

Older rats require less protein. A diet lower in protein is important as their kidneys age and can't process it as well. As they get older and their metabolism and activity slow down the extra protein can be rough on their kidneys. Also, just like with humans, too much protein can end up stored as fat in the liver. No one likes a fatty liver! High protein diets can also make an older rats' skin very itchy. And finally, higher protein diets also tend to be higher in fat. Depending on the source of the protein this can significantly raise the level of saturated fats. Lower fat is always recommended because, as any of us get older, we tend to put on weight.

Be careful about the other ingredients in the food as well. Fillers such as corn and alfalfa – and yes, we have seen alfalfa listed in rat food – are indigestible to rats, and can lead to health issues if too much is fed. Of course, artificial preservatives and other additives should also be avoided.

Our ultimate goal is to help you choose the healthiest and most economical rat foods possible. With some attention to making proper choices, preparing your rats' meals can be an easy process that's fun for both you and your rats! MRR recommends feeding rats a high quality lab block, supplemented by a homemade grain mix, fruits and vegetables.

A. Lab Blocks

Our advice is to keep a dish of these blocks in the cage at all times. We recommend:

1. Envigo or Teklad

We believe this is the most economical and healthiest lab block available. Envigo (formerly Harlan Teklad) is a high-quality food without "fillers." Rats eat less of it because 100% of the food is actually food. Comparatively, some of the types you see in the store are 60-70% actual food, so the rats need to eat more of it to get the nutrients they need. Many of these pet store mixes contain corn in several dried forms, which is not digestible to rats and has little nutritional value. The corn they use is often of questionable quality and can contain a fungus that is known to cause cancer, as well as a surplus of preservatives. These foods also often contain alfalfa in one form or another, which cannot be digested by rats.

Teklad blocks are available in 3 different formulas (baby and teens, adult, and senior). All MRR rats are currently on a diet of the HT formula best suited for their needs, supplemented with a homemade grain mix as well as fresh fruits and vegetables. ***Once you have been matched with your rats the MRR Food Store counselor will advise you as to the best formula for your rats.***

If you are adopting baby or teen rats, we ask that they be fed the Teklad 2018 until they are 7 months old and can graduate to an approved adult diet. The 2018 is a formula that best suits a growing rats needs.

HT can be purchased from our online store, click on the food store link on the front page of our website, www.mainelyratrescue.org. Even with shipping costs, you'll typically spend less for the Harlan Teklad than you would for less healthy blocks found in a pet store.

2. Oxbow Regal Rat

Oxbow Regal Rat is a corn-free block that is available in pet and feed stores. We consider it a viable alternative to HT blocks, though it can be expensive. However, this should not be fed to rats under 6-8 months old as it does not meet their protein requirements.

B. Homemade Grain Mix

1. Suebee's homemade mix recipe + lab blocks

Lab blocks will provide a complete diet but we recommend feeding them with a homemade grain mix such as Suebee's – <http://ratsrule.com/diet.html>. However, if you follow this recipe, leave out the dog food if you are feeding one of the recommended blocks listed above. You can also make substitutions for many of the ingredients. If your rats like the grain mix so much they ignore their lab blocks, give them the grain mix every other day! The blocks should provide the main source of their diet.

2. Suebee's homemade mix recipe + dog food (instead of lab blocks)

You can also feed your rats a grain mix such as Suebee's and use a dry dog food instead of using lab blocks. If you choose this route, be sure to use a low protein, low fat dry dog food. Our research shows that only two dog foods at this time meet the protein requirements of rats: Solid Gold Holistique Blendz or Nutro Natural Lite. We are updating our list all the time so please check with us if you want to try this combination.

3. Debbie "The Rat Lady" Ducommun's Homemade Grain Mix + lab blocks

Another homemade grain mix option: <http://www.ratfanclub.org/diet.html> This grain mix would be fed with lab blocks.

C. Fruits and Vegetables

Fresh fruits and veggies are an important part of your rats' diet. If produce is out of season, or if it is difficult for you to keep it without spoiling, you can use frozen fruits and vegetables as well, which can be served frozen, thawed or cooked.

D. Treats

Rats can eat almost anything that is healthy for humans which makes feeding them pleasurable. In fact, rats love to sample a part of your healthy dinner and will eat chicken, seafood, fish, pastas, rice, eggs, pizza, just about anything! Enjoy the fun of sharing your own favorite foods with your ratty companions!

E. Foods to Avoid

There are some foods that, while they may seem healthy, have qualities which make them hazardous. Check out this link to see foods that should be avoided when feeding your rats.
<http://www.ratforum.com/showthread.php?39486-Good-and-Bad-Food-for-Rats-amp-Ratty-Recipes>

F. In the Pet Store

Dangerous viruses such as Sendai and SDA may be present in pet stores that carry live rodents. These viruses are airborne and can live off the rat for up to 3 hours. You do not need to touch a rat or even see a rat to carry these viruses home to your own pets. We recommend that you buy supplies online or at a store that does not carry rodents so it is much easier to keep quarantine at home. Otherwise, it is best to plan your errands such that the store is first on your list, followed by your other errands, and plan to be out of your home for 3 hours after leaving the store. For more information on rat illnesses, see our [Rat Education Overview](#) document.