

What Can I Feed My Rat?

People often ask, “What do rats eat?” The simple answer is almost everything. However, rats may try to eat anything they can reach, so it’s important for owners to prevent them from consuming anything harmful or toxic. This list offers some basic guidelines for rat nutrition, and we welcome your feedback.

SAFE FOODS

Feeding rats excessive amounts of fruit may result in digestive issues and increased weight. Additionally, a diet high in fruit is not balanced and may not support long-term health for rats. It is generally suggested to limit fruit to around one tablespoon per day for an average adult rat. Examples of approximate recommended daily quantities for different fruits will be provided. If offering more than one type of fruit per day, the appropriate amounts should be determined accordingly. Fruits are best served fresh, rather than dried, canned, preserved, or processed, as certain preservation and drying methods may add chemicals or sugar.

Fruits: Offer in moderation.

Provide sugary foods such as fruit to rats only occasionally, as excessive amounts may lead to diarrhea and other health concerns. Adhere to the recommended daily quantities for each item and avoid surpassing the total intake by offering the maximum of several choices in a single day. These portions are intended to complement, not substitute, a nutritionally complete base diet formulated for adult rats. It is advisable not to administer the upper limit of every food group on a daily basis. A diverse selection of fresh, seasonal produce contributes positively to your rats’ wellbeing while helping to manage expenses.

- **Apples:** Slice the fruit and remove all seeds, as they pose a hazard to rats. Recommended serving: 3 cubes (1 inch each) or 1 of 8 equal slices.
- **Avocados:** Highly fatty for rats; offer sparingly. Serving: 2 cubes (1 inch each).
- **Bananas:** Fresh only. Serving: 2 slices (1 inch each).
- **Berries:** Includes blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, cranberries, raspberries, and strawberries. Serving: 2 tablespoons, approximately 1 strawberry, 3 black/raspberry/boysenberries, or 5 blueberries/cranberries.
- **Dried Cranberries:** Beneficial for rats prone to urinary tract infections, promoting urinary health. Serving: 3 dried cranberries.
- **Grapes:** Purple grapes may help reduce cancer risk in rats. Serving: 3 large grapes.
- **Kiwi:** Provide 1 tablespoon, 1 quarter-inch slice, or 2 one-inch cubes.
- **Melons:** Such as watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew; do not serve the rind. Serving: 3 one-inch squares.
- **Papaya:** Serving: 2 one-inch cubes.

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- **Pears:** Serving: 3 one-inch cubes.
- **Pomegranates:** Serving: 2 tablespoons of pips.
- **Stone Fruits:** Includes peaches, apricots, plums, cherries; pits and seeds must be excluded. Serving: 3 one-inch squares.

Vegetables

Vegetables generally offer greater health benefits than fruits due to their lower sugar content. While some vegetables may be suitable for rats, others are not recommended because of potential side effects or limited nutritional value. For adult rats, approximately three tablespoons of mixed fresh vegetable salad is considered appropriate. Fresh, uncooked vegetables are preferred unless specified otherwise, as cooking can diminish nutritional value. Additionally, crunchy vegetables help maintain dental health and satisfy rats' natural gnawing instincts.

- **Bell Pepper:** Any color is acceptable; non-spicy peppers are also suitable. Recommended serving is three tablespoons or 2–3 slices at ¼” thickness.
- **Bok Choy:** 1–2 leaves per serving.
- **Broccoli:** Rats can consume broccoli, but it may cause digestive discomfort. Limit to 2–3 florets.
- **Carrots:** Both cooked and raw (peeled) carrots are safe; peeling is advised for hygiene. Offer a 3" section from a carrot with a ¾” diameter, or small shavings.
- **Cauliflower:** 2–3 florets per serving.
- **Celery:** Safe but minimally nutritious; provide only a 1” stalk if included.
- **Corn:** Only serve fresh corn on the cob; avoid dried corn due to contamination risk. A 3” cob section, or a whole cob for multiple rats.
- **Cucumber:** Provide four 1” slices per serving.
- **Green Beans:** Three full-sized beans are suitable.
- **Kale:** 1–2 leaves per serving.
- **Lettuce:** Romaine, green leaf, or red leaf lettuce provide better nutrition than iceberg. Serve 1–2 leaves.
- **Parsley:** Two sprigs per serving.
- **Peas:** Sugar snap and snow peas contain higher sugars; limit to three tablespoons.
- **Potatoes:** All varieties, including yams, should be thoroughly cooked with skins and eyes removed. Two tablespoons per serving, either in chunks or mashed.
- **Pumpkins:** Edible for rats, though seeds should be given sparingly due to high fat. Four 1” chunks per serving.
- **Squash:** Varieties such as butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash should be thoroughly cooked, with rinds excluded. Seeds can be offered. Four 1” cubes per serving.

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Grains

Grains are a primary component of rodent diets and serve as an excellent nutritional base. An active and healthy rat may consume up to 1/4 cup of grains daily. It is advisable to select whole grains with minimal processing and avoid options with limited nutritional value, such as bleached white rice or fortified noodles. Incorporating a variety of grains helps provide a diverse array of nutrients throughout the day.

- **Bread:** Fresh bread poses a choking risk; however, dried bread—left out overnight until hard—can be offered as a snack. It is recommended to cut bread into smaller pieces beforehand. Select whole grain or sprouted breads containing nuts and seeds. Serving size: 1/2 slice.
- **Dry cereal:** Appropriate choices include Cheerios, Rice Crispies, bran flakes, Chex, or shredded wheat. Cereals high in sugar should be avoided; always review product labels before feeding. Serving size: 1/4 cup.
- **Rolled oats:** Any unsweetened variety is suitable, but those containing added sugars, such as many granolas, should be excluded. Serving size: 1/4 cup.
- **Pasta:** Both cooked and dried pasta are acceptable. Dried pasta aids in dental health by helping wear down teeth. Flavored varieties, such as tri-colored spirals with spinach or tomato, may enhance palatability. Serving size: 1/4 cup.
- **Rice:** Brown rice offers greater nutritional value compared to white rice, which should be considered an occasional treat. Rice may be served cooked or uncooked, depending on preference. Serving size: 1/8 cup.

Meat/Nuts/Seeds

Rats are omnivores and can eat meat, but lean options are healthiest—reserve fatty foods for sick rats who need extra calories. About 2 tablespoons of protein-rich food is a good addition.

- **Beans:** Always cook before serving; 2 tablespoons cooked.
- **Meat:** Unseasoned chicken is best; beef, turkey, pork, fish also acceptable in small portions. Limit fat. 2 pieces (1" each).
- **Nuts:** Roasted (not salted) cashews, walnuts, almonds, or pecans; 2 tablespoons.
- **Chicken bones:** Safe to chew and eat; offer 1 small bone.
- **Dog/cat food:** Use only high-quality varieties; 2 tablespoons.
- **Mealworms:** 2–3 dried mealworms.
- **Eggs:** Great protein source, especially scrambled or boiled; serve 1 egg.
- **Soy products:** Roasted, unsalted soy nuts, milk, yogurt, tofu, or crumbles; 2 tablespoons.
- **Sunflower seeds:** Unsalted only; 2 tablespoons for occasional snacks.

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Fatty Foods

For underweight rats, these foods can help with weight gain. Avoid giving too many treats, as it may lead to poor nutrition and hinder recovery. **Always consult a veterinarian for proper care.**

- Avocado
- Beef
- Chicken skin
- Sunflower seeds
- Cashews
- Pumpkin
- Squash

Junk Foods

There are numerous types of foods considered junk food. Occasional small servings, such as a taste of ice cream or pizza, typically do not pose serious health risks to rats, but these items are not recommended as healthy options. Some individuals offer only whole, organic, non-GMO, or vegan foods to rats, while others may include occasional treats; both approaches have resulted in healthy rats. However, junk food is not suitable as a rat's main diet, and leftovers should not serve as their primary source of nutrition.

- ***Apple Sauce and Baby Food***: Packaged or processed foods like applesauce or baby food should be evaluated for sugar and preservative content before feeding. While some products are nutritious, many contain additives.
- ***Crackers***: Crackers often contain high amounts of salt, though they can be offered infrequently as a treat.
- ***Dairy Foods***: Dairy products such as cheese, cottage cheese, cream cheese, and yogurt should be given in small quantities, especially if lactose intolerance is uncertain. Dairy can be used for training purposes or to administer medication.
- ***Lunch Meats***: These typically contain preservatives, sodium, and fat, which may be unsuitable for rats.
- ***Mushrooms***: Only cooked mushrooms are appropriate and should be served in moderation.
- ***Popcorn***: Unsalted and unbuttered popcorn is preferable.
- ***Small Dog Treats***: Ingredients must be checked carefully for animal foods not specifically formulated for rats, as they may include components listed as harmful for rats.

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- ***Yogurt Covered Pretzels***: Should be fed sparingly due to added sugars and other ingredients.
- ***Yogurt Drops***: Most rats enjoy yogurt drops, but many brands use sugar as a primary ingredient. Healthier alternatives are available among certain baby food brands.

HARMFUL FOODS

- **Apple seeds**: Contain cyanide, which is toxic to rats.
- **Raw artichokes**: Inhibit protein digestion in rats.
- **Avocado skin**.
- **Raw beans**: Destroy vitamin A and essential enzymes required by rats for digesting proteins and starches; can cause red blood cells to clump, posing serious health risks.
- **Beet tops**: High levels of oxalates may lead to urinary tract issues and the formation of kidney and bladder stones.
- **Blue cheese**: The mold used in its production is toxic to rats.
- **Raw Brussels sprouts**: Can destroy thiamin.
- **Carbonated drinks**: Rats are unable to burp, making carbonated beverages unsafe.
- **Caffeinated drinks**: High sugar content is detrimental to rats' health.
- **Candy**: Excessive sugar can be problematic for rat digestion.
- **Chocolate**: Due to high fat and sugar content, chocolate is not recommended for rats.
- **Dried corn**: May contain fungal contaminants that increase the risk of liver cancer in rats; fresh corn is acceptable.
- **Green bananas**: Inhibit enzymes necessary for starch digestion.
- **Green potato skins and eyes**: Contain solanine, a harmful toxin for rats.
- **Hamster food**: Typically contains high fat levels, unsuitable for rats.
- **Licorice**: Suspected to cause neurological toxicity in rats.
- **Mango**: Contains d-limonene, which can lead to kidney cancer in male rats.
- **Moldy foods**: Toxic mold and bacteria present significant health hazards for rats.
- **Raw onions**: May cause anemia and gastric discomfort in rats.
- **Oranges**: Orange peels and white pith may be harmful to male rats; avoidance is recommended.
- **Orange juice**: Contains d-limonene, which may contribute to kidney cancer in male rats.
- **Peanuts**: Possess anti-nutrients that disrupt vitamin A and enzyme activity, potentially causing red blood cells to clump.
- **Poppy seeds**: Associated with illness and mortality in rats, though the exact mechanism is unclear.
- **Potato eyes and skins**.
- **Raw red cabbage**: Destroys thiamin.

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- **Rhubarb:** Contains toxic levels of oxalates.
- **Spinach:** High oxalate content can result in urinary tract complications and the formation of kidney or bladder stones.
- **Sweet feed:** Intended for horses, its high corn and molasses content is inappropriate for rats.
- **Raw sweet potato:** Contains compounds that may produce cyanide in the rat's stomach.
- **Raw bulk tofu:** May harbor bacteria and is considered unsafe.
- **Wild insects:** Should not be given to rats due to the potential risk of disease and internal parasites; commercially prepared cooked insects may be acceptable.