**YVCipedia SMALL MAMMAL**

Mouse Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Domestic mice (*Mus musculus*) are small, highly social rodents known for their agility, curiosity, and ability to form bonds with humans and cage-mates. They live about 18–24 months in home conditions. Mice are crepuscular but may become more active during the day with consistent routines. Their cleverness makes them enjoy exploring and interacting with their environment.

## **Housing & Environment**

Mice thrive in escape-proof, well-ventilated cages with solid floors; wire mesh can injure their feet. They love burrowing and nesting, so a deep layer of enrichment bedding is essential. Providing nesting materials and climbing opportunities helps maintain their physical and mental health. Cage placement should avoid direct heat or drafts, with clean water and food dishes maintained regularly.

**Habitat Highlights:**

* **Cage size:** At least 18″ × 18″ × 10″ for 2–3 mice
* **Bedding:** 3–4 in deep of paper-based or aspen bedding
* **Enclosure:** Solid floor, wire lid for ventilation
* **Cleaning:** Spot-clean every 2–4 days; full change weekly
* **Enrichment:** Tunnels, hideouts, safe chew materials, exercise wheel

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Your mouse’s diet should rely on a high-quality pelleted feed formulated for mice. Supplementation with small amounts of fresh vegetables, occasional fruits, and protein treats like cooked egg or mealworms enhances nutrition and enrichment. Avoid seed-heavy mixes and sugary foods. Fresh, clean water should be available daily via a sipper bottle, with a bowl as backup during acclimation.

**Diet Essentials:**

* **Pellets:** Commercial mouse-formulated diet (primary food) - we recommend Oxbow
* **Fresh foods:** Optional veggies and protein once or twice weekly
* **Treats:** Small fruit portions or seed bits, limited
* **Water:** Clean bottle + optional bowl; refreshed daily

## **Healthcare**

Even healthy mice can hide illness. A veterinarian experienced in exotics should assess your mouse soon after acquisition and at least annually. Watch for signs like ruffled fur, lethargy, abnormal breathing, or changes in stool, as these often signal illness. Common conditions include wet tail (diarrhea), respiratory infections, dental overgrowth, skin parasites, tumors, and sporadic epilepsy.

**Health Highlights:**

* **Vet visits:** First exam soon after adoption; annual checkups recommended
* **Watch for:** Lethargy, rough coat, labored breathing, diarrhea, weight loss, lumps
* **Common issues:** Respiratory disease, GI disturbance, dental problems, tumors, epilepsy
* **Handling safety:** Support body fully; avoid tail lifting

## **Behavior & Handling**

Mice are best handled gently in daylight to reduce surprise and stress. Use cupped hands or a small tunnel to pick them up rather than by the tail. They enjoy gentle interaction and may respond to human voices, but avoid sudden movements. Most get comfortable with brief daily handling sessions. Mice appreciate routine and bond with cage-mates—alone they can become distressed.

**Handling Tips:**

* **Social:** Keep in same-sex groups when possible
* **Lifting:** Scoop gently; limit grabbing tail
* **Interaction:** Short, calm sessions during active periods
* **Behavior:** Watch for thumping, excessive scratching, or hiding

## **Grooming & Enrichment**

Mice are meticulous self-groomers and don’t require baths. Provide hiding options, nesting material, tunnels, and chew toys to support natural behaviors and prevent boredom. A safe exercise wheel with a solid surface helps keep them active. Regular cage maintenance and variation in enrichment are key to both health and happiness.

**Enrichment Essentials:**

* **Self-grooming:** Bathing unnecessary; mice handle it
* **Bedding:** Deep layer encourages burrowing
* **Toys:** Rotate chew blocks, tubes, and puzzle feeders
* **Exercise:** Wheel with solid running surface
* **Cage care:** Weekly wash and safe cleaning agents

## **Fun Facts & FAQs**

* **Tail handling stress:** Cupped or tunnel picking reduces anxiety compared to tail lifting.
* **Territorial vocalizations:** Some may squeak softly during play or sniffing.
* **Coprophagy is normal:** Mice re-eat certain stools to recover nutrients.
* **Tumors can be common:** Especially in older mice, so regular palpation is important.
* **Wet tail**: A serious diarrheal condition—seek care immediately if suspected.

### **Supplies Checklist**

* Spacious cage with solid base and wire ventilation lid
* Deep (3–4 in) paper or aspen bedding with nesting materials
* Ceramic food bowl, water bottle (plus secondary dish)
* Commercial mouse pellets; supplemental veggies and protein treats
* Hideouts, tunnels, chew toys, exercise wheel
* Secure, ventilated travel carrier

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*