

Rat Suddenly Becomes Ill

Why would a rat suddenly become ill and die?

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Q: My rat got ill suddenly and passed away. I had him for only 1.5 months. The pet store told me he was 4 months old when I got him. Did I just get a sick rat?

I fed him a commercially made rat diet of seeds and pellets, but also gave him baby carrots about once every other day. He also nibbled at his bedding (magazine pages). Could this have caused diarrhea and sudden death? The reason I used that kind of bedding was because the fluffy kind in the store made him have sneeze attacks.

He got sick quite suddenly — one day he was lying on his side, twitching his foot, but very much alive. I held and petted him, and he was abnormally receptive to this. Then I realized he made diarrhea in my hand. I put him in his cage and he wobbled a little, like he was struggling to stay up. By the end of the day, he was lying down and squeaking every once in a while or when I touched him at all.

A: Sorry to hear about your pet rat. Some pet rats only live until about 2 years of age and some can live a few years longer. It may be that your rat was at the end of his normal life span. Also, your rat may have been older than the 4 months of age that they told you at the pet store. It may be there was nothing you could have done to save your pet if he died of the diseases we see in older rats.

Did his diet and bedding cause a problem? Probably not. If you decide to get another rat, however, please consider some of the following ideas.

- 1) Many foods are on the pet store shelves for rats, but some are better than others. I suggest using the premium brands. Most of these companies put money into research to provide the best nutrients for your pet rat.
- 2) I am not a fan of magazine page bedding. Rats need bedding that is nontoxic and meant for use by small mammals. Avoid cage bedding that contains aromatic oils like cedar shavings. Again, there are premium products out there that will not harm your rat's respiratory system or its digestive system if eaten.