

Pest Gnome



Can Sewer Rats Swim Up Your Toilet?

By Jeffery Keusseyan | Updated: December 19, 2024

[Rodent Control](#)



Sewer rats can swim up your toilet if they sniff out tasty food crumbs coming down the drains. Superheroes of the rodent world, sewer rats have supreme skills in climbing and swimming. If they smell food stuck in sewer drains leading up to your home, then their curiosity and determination could lead them straight to your toilet. Let's explore how rats manage to swim up toilets, why they do so, and how to get rid of them.

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Can Sewer Rats Swim Up Your Toilet?



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Sewer rats are more than capable of swimming up your toilet, so it's not just a myth among homeowners. Sewer rats, also known as Norway rats, are excellent swimmers. They can hold their breath underwater – for as long as three minutes – and crawl up the sewer to get into your kitchen, attic, walls, or basement. Getting bitten by a rat swimming up your toilet is a very rare occurrence, yet a terrifying situation to imagine.

How Do Rats Get In Your Toilet?

Rats can get in your toilet by skilfully shimmying through exposed pipes in sewer systems' lateral lines. In case you're wondering why rats find sewer systems a highly attractive

environment: They are moist, dark, and safe from predators. They travel across the sewer pipes both vertically and horizontally, treating them like their very own highway system.

Norway rats can paddle using their legs while their long tails act as rudders to switch directions. On top of that, they can hold their breath slightly longer than an average human (about 3 minutes). That's how they manage to easily get up the U-bend of your toilet and make you scream out of shock.

Fun fact: Norway (or sewer) rats can tread water for 3 to 4 days, and swim up to half a mile to reach favorable ground conditions.

Why Would Sewer Rats Get In Your Toilet?



In short, hunger and determination. Rats have a keen sense of smell, and can smell scraps of food that you dump down your sink. They're not enhancing their swimming ability to join the olympics, but simply to feed on [food found in your kitchen](#). Once they're in your home, they can build nests in your walls, attic, basement, or garage.

Rats are naturally curious and very determined creatures. If they locate a small hole or opening in the sewer pipes, they will enter them and see where it takes them. Let's not forget what makes sewer systems a perfect environment for rats: They are moist, dark, and safe from predators. So if you're unlucky enough to spot one in your toilet, how can you get rid of it?

How to Get Rid of a Rat In Your Toilet Bowl

In case you were wondering, flushing the toilet won't necessarily work. The rat may end up surviving the flushing process, or worse, clog the toilet after it dies. Here are more effective measures in getting rid of a rat in your toilet bowl.

Contact a Rodent Control Expert

One way of handling the rat issue is by shutting the toilet lid, closing the bathroom door, and contacting a rodent control expert. Be sure to place a heavy object on the lid to prevent the mouse from pushing it up. If the bathroom door has a clear opening at the bottom, seal it to keep the rat from getting out and exploring your home. Rodent control experts recommend this measure, as it keeps you safe from getting in contact with the disease-carrying pest.

The expert will use a snare to remove the rat from the toilet, keeping it alive. In rare cases, the pro may arrive to see the rat already gone. After shutting down the lid, it may feel encouraged to head back to the sewer pipes.

Pour Bleach Into the Bowl

You can take the DIY route by pouring bleach into the toilet bowl, shutting the lid, and waiting for the rat to asphyxiate. This process takes about 15 minutes, and is less humane than letting the professional remove it with a snare. It is also quite risky, since you're dealing with harmful chemicals and the possibility of the rat climbing out of the toilet bowl. You're now left with an invading pest and a bathroom that reeks of bleach.

Don't Forget to Sanitize the Bathroom



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Once the rat is removed from the toilet, whether by you or a professional, put on safety gloves and sanitize the entire bathroom. Be sure to remove any droppings and traces of

urine. Once you've sanitized the bathroom, wash your hands with antibacterial soap. If you neglect this step, you risk getting exposed to the many [diseases spread by rats](#).

How to Prevent Rats From Entering Toilet Bowls

Install a Non-Return Valve

The non-return valve, or rat blocker, is a stainless steel flap that attaches to the sewer drain. The device is easy to install – provided you follow the manufacturer's instructions – and can stop sewer rats dead in their tracks. To double-check which pipe takes the waste out, simply flush the toilet. You can always hire a plumber if you can't install the valve yourself.

Seal Garbage Cans



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This applies to keeping mice, rats, and other rodents out of your home. Make sure that garbage cans next to curb drains are tightly sealed to keep rats from venturing into your property. Leaving them open is like hosting an outdoor buffet and inviting them into your home for the after-party.

Reduce Food Waste

Throwing uneaten foods or organic wastes down the drain will almost certainly attract mice to your home. This especially applies to greasy, sweet food such as cooked pasta, sweets, cereal, and fruits. It's also recommended that you clean your kitchen drain monthly to keep food from getting blocked inside the drains and attracting rodents.

Apart from these measures, there's not much that you can do to keep these curious critters away. There are easier ways for rats to enter your home, but more on this later.

Repair Cracks in Piping

To keep rats from joyfully swimming in your drain pipes, you must keep them from getting inside in the first place. Seal off any access points using a compound of caulk and steel wool. When mixed together, rats won't be able to gnaw through it. You can also use epoxy putty for wet surfaces to seal any holes or tiny openings.

Stop Flushing Down Fibrous Materials

Flushing down wet wipes, napkins, and even diapers is like handing rats ready-made nesting materials. You'll also keep them coming back from more, until they eventually pop out of your toilet. To get rid of such fibrous materials, simply throw them away in sealed garbage cans.

Remove Nearby Plants

Cut back plants and shrubs that give Norway rats easy access to your drainage and pipes, especially ones with long limbs that offer entry ways. This measure also helps in keeping them away from other attractive parts of your home, such as your garage or basement.

Clean the Kitchen Drain



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If you don't throw away food crumbs before washing your dishes, they may stick to your pipes and attract rats to feast on them. This is why cleaning your kitchen drains once a month (or more) is necessary to keep this from happening. You can buy ready-made products for unclogging or cleaning kitchen drains, or use a homemade solution containing baking soda and vinegar.

Which Type of Rats Lives in Sewers?

Sewer rats are also known as brown rats, Norway rats, street rats, and common rats. This is the main species that dominates sewage systems and climbs up your toilet. They are

excellent climbers and swimmers, but also among the most dangerous to humans. Other species of rats prefer living in forests and woodlands.

Are There Easier Ways for Rats to Enter Your Home?



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Yes, there are much easier ways for rats to enter your home. These incredibly agile rodents can climb walls, squeeze through small holes, and jump up to 3 feet into the air. Their ribs are hinged at the spine, and collapse when squeezing through tight spaces. Rats have powerful teeth that allow them to chew through plastic, wood, cloth, and other materials.

All of the above superpowers allow rats to enter your home by:

- Chewing through insulation
- Running along utility lines
- Squeezing through openings in your home's foundation
- Climbing down your chimney
- Entering through holes in external walls

Rats in your home will feast on unpacked foods in the kitchen, build nests to raise pups, or wait out the winter season. Rats do not [hibernate in winter](#), so they'll remain active after entering your home.

FAQ About Rats Swimming Up Your Toilet

Can rats come up through shower drains?

Yes, Norway rats can come up through shower drains if the drain system's diameter is large enough for them to fit through. They are extremely flexible, so squeezing through tight gaps is not an issue for them. However, sewer rats traveling through drain pipes are more likely to end up in your toilet bowl.

Can rats swim up toilets in rural homes?

Nothing prevents rats from swimming up toilets in rural homes. It's not just residents of metropolitan areas like New York City that have to worry about rats in toilets. Rats may be found anywhere with indoor plumbing since it's a dark, safe environment. As long as the diameter of the drain system is large enough for rats to fit through, they will attempt to swim up your toilet.

Are sewer rats dangerous?

In short, yes. As mentioned in a previous section, sewer rats carry various diseases that can harm any member of your family. After entering your home via the toilet, they can chew electrical wires which may cause multiple malfunctions and even fires. If you spot a rat in the toilet, it's vital to get rid of it before it scurries around your home.

Is it safe to use d-CON to get rid of rats in the toilet?

The [Environmental Protection Agency](#) (EPA) strongly advises against the use of d-CON rat control products. They are not effective, may take up to a week to work, and are very harmful to humans. Generally speaking, avoid using rat poison to get these rodents out of any part of the house.

What should you do with a dead rat in the toilet bowl?

A rat may die in your toilet bowl if it drowns after constant flushing with the toilet lid shut. It may also die after you pour bleach into the toilet bowl and wait until it dies from asphyxiation. Whatever the case, you should not flush it down the toilet. You will risk clogging your sewer pipe and cause a much bigger problem than a dead rodent in the toilet bowl. Contact a pest control expert to get rid of the critter for you, and refrain from touching it without safety gloves on.

How long do rats live?

[Rats can live 1 to 3 years](#), depending on their species and environment.

Shut the Toilet Lid and Hire a Pro

Unfortunately, sewer rats are and always will be great swimmers. Having them swim up your toilet is a rare occurrence, but a possibility nonetheless. Avoid throwing greasy food down the kitchen drain to keep the rats from sniffing out food that sticks to the drain pipes. Cleaning the kitchen drain at least once a month will also remove any food that rats will locate.

If a rat does its way to your toilet, don't start flushing it non-stop. It's not a surefire way to get rid of it, and could cause a more serious problem such as clogs. A highly recommended method is shutting the toilet lid and bathroom door before contacting [a local rodent control company](#). The rat will be removed by a snare, so it's more humane than pouring bleach and asphyxiating it.

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