

## HANDLING COMMON LABORATORY SPECIES

### Mice

Mice are usually caught and lifted by the tail. The tail should be grasped about two-thirds of the way down. With this simple method of holding, they may be transferred to another cage or a balance, identified, examined casually or possibly sexed; but such restraint is not sufficient for treatment and close examination.

For more effective control, the mouse may be held by the tail and placed on a table or other surface, preferably one that the mouse can grasp, and the loose skin over the neck and shoulders grasped with the thumb and fingers. In the process of grasping at this point, the mouse can turn and bite, but once grasped correctly the head is adequately controlled. With the tail or the tail and the rear legs held by other fingers or the other hand, a good hold for examination or treatment is possible (Fig. 1).

### Rats

Rats are normally lifted by grasping the whole body, palm over back and side with forefinger behind the head, and the thumb and second finger in opposite axilla extending the forelimbs so that they may be controlled (Fig. 2). Rats may also be temporarily restrained by the tail. Holding with one hand is usually adequate for control, but the tail, rear legs or lower part of body may be held by the other hand for closer control, or treatment or examination by a second person.

Young rats may be handled in a way similar to that for mice if the rat is too small to easily handle within the hand. Presence of Chassaignac's tubercle, a thin plate of bone extending from the transverse processes of the vertebrae, makes it difficult to grasp the skin of the back. Rats will bite and certain strains are more aggressive than others, i.e., F344 is more aggressive than Sprague-Dawley, so care and experience are essential to rapid handling. Various restraining devices are available for use with rats.

### Hamsters

Hamsters will bite quickly and deeply and are easily aroused; consequently, they should be approached gently and with caution until they become accustomed to being handled and are familiar with the handler. Several methods may be useful in handling the hamster. Both hands may be cupped under the animal to hold the hamster in the palms. They may be picked up with one hand, in a similar manner to that of the rat.

The thumb under the chin and the forefinger around the neck afford good control with one hand. Grasping the loose skin over the neck and shoulder also provides an effective method of control with one hand; however, this skin is very loose and practice is necessary before this method can be used casually (Fig. 3). It is sometimes easier for the occasional handler to use a cup when transferring hamsters from point to point when detailed manipulations are not necessary.

### Gerbils

Gerbils respond to and are effectively handled by the general methods indicated for other small rodents. For rapid handling of a large number, lifting by the tail near the body is desirable. Avoid holding gerbils near the end of the tail because the skin near the tip of the tail is fragile and may slip off.

### Guinea Pigs

Guinea pigs seldom bite, but are timid or easily frightened and usually make determined efforts to escape when held. They are best held by placing the thumb and forefinger around the neck, with the palm over the back and the other fingers grasping the body. When lifting, the other hand should be used to support the lower part of the body (Fig. 4). Special care should be exercised in handling pregnant females since they may become very heavy and awkward in late pregnancy.

### Rabbits

Rabbits seldom bite, but can inflict painful scratch wounds, especially with the hind feet. Hold them in a way that directs their hind feet away from your body. Grasping the loose skin over the shoulder with the head directed away from the holder is the best method of initial restraint. When lifting, the lower part of the body is supported by the other hand (Fig. 5). A rabbit should **NEVER** be lifted by the ears. Always use two hands. If the rabbit begins to struggle violently and develops rotational movement with the hind quarters, it should immediately be placed on a solid surface and calmed.

Continued violent struggling frequently leads to fracture of one or more lumbar vertebrae, and fatal injury to the spinal cord. During restraint, rabbits may exhibit sudden violent efforts to escape, and, in the process, dislodge intravenous needles, gavage tubes, etc., causing spills or otherwise endangering themselves or personnel. Consequently, it is essential that complete restraint be accomplished before attempting such procedures.

Particularly important are mechanical restrainers such as the one shown in Fig. 6. Use of cloth restraint bags, "cat bags" is the preferred method for cats and rabbits. These are strongly recommended for most procedures. They may or may not be in the individual animal rooms; if not, consult Veterinary Resources (x6-3540). When returning rabbits to their cages, it is best to put them in rear end first as they will be less apt to jump out of your hands.

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